

SCREEN

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SPECIAL DOUBLE ISSUE

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EDITORIAL

Screen enters 1980, the 30th year of SEFT, with a revised project and a new format. We are taking the opportunity of the present double issue to introduce a comprehensively planned new design which signals our reassessment of the role and intentions of the magazine.

In 1971 *Screen* was relaunched as a quarterly magazine devoted to film culture. It saw its priorities as the constitution of a body of knowledge about film and television as signifying practices. This involved a radical questioning of existing theories and forms of writing about film and the introduction of new approaches and terminologies adequate to the complexity of the problems posed. The role of *Screen* in developing critical and theoretical work founded on semiotics and psychoanalysis, together with a constant reference to other aesthetic theories (notably those surrounding the areas of realism and authorship) has given the magazine an influential position in a number of distinct, but related fields. In film and television education, *Screen* has helped to define the subject area among educators not just in Britain but in North America and Australia. In film-making it has offered a series of possibilities for the thinking through of particular practices of representation — whether it be in terms of 'deconstruction', 'denaturalisation' or of disrupting the subject positioning usually put in place within the institution of the 'classic text'. For other aesthetic practices, in the fine arts or photography, for example, *Screen* stands for theorisation of particular practices and their politics in a way that there has not been space for in the art world or even in its radical offshoots.

Finally, *Screen* has offered to cultural and literary theory, and to theories of the place of 'ideology' in the social formation, a constant insistence on language in its specificity as signifying practice rather than as communication; in the light of this insistence it has worked to examine the nature of the text as systematic process and to explore the subject, as conceived by psychoanalysis, as an area of political struggle.

the awareness of the effects of the magazine's work in a variety of fields. We will try to calculate what effects are necessary and possible, and to use various forms of writing to influence those diverse cultural practices in which *Screen* has and could have a voice. The magazine's primary commitment is to film and television, but it will continue to be informed by a wider concern for all practices of representation. *Screen* will extend its debates and analyses of current trends in film and television to other areas of cultural work as one major way of promoting the magazine's various approaches in these areas. *Screen* expects, therefore, to publish reviews of films and television output which are seen as representative of key issues in current debates. Similarly, we will give attention to exhibitions, publications and other events in the area of art practice and criticism which are related to these debates. We are keenly aware of the way in which reviewing acts as a promotion for the object reviewed, as well as affecting the terms in which these objects are used and discussed. This situation is particularly acute in relation to film, where reviewing is a major factor in the marketing of particular films, especially in the area of art-house cinema. We therefore intend that a major part of our reviewing commitment should be one of providing a critical 'voice' for independent production (treated to scant and disparaging attention by orthodox reviewers), and we think it particularly important to make our ideas more appropriate in the support of such films.

Screen will continue to comment in a detailed and systematic way upon institutional structures and policies; and will engage with major debates over institutional changes, for example with the Fourth Channel discussions; and with schemes for new state interventions in the film industry. Other possible areas of concern are the Arts Council and the British Film Institute; education, especially the higher and further education sectors; publishing and so on. Another strategy that is now possible is that of searching interviews with particular individuals or groups who have a distinct position which perhaps has not received comprehensive attention in writing before. We hope that this form of opening out of the pages of the magazine to a wider range of writing and of presenting important but usually unheard voices will be complemented by meetings and discussions.

Screen's entry into forms of reviewing and engagement with immediate issues is not intended to be exclusive. It is one

part of promoting the magazine's work in areas where it is capable of having specific effects. It does not imply an exclusive concentration on the present, nor an abandonment of the magazine's established tradition of work in the area of conceptual elaboration. The exclusive concentration on the contemporary is the hallmark of almost all film and television journalism, and is a major factor in producing the blindnesses of the conventional journalistic form. We rather intend that the continuing engagement of the magazine in the matters of the day will set the agenda for both theoretical and historical work. The reviewing of films or television output will inevitably raise wider questions, both about reviewing as a practice of writing, and about filmic institutions and textual productivity. This again is a matter of exploiting an awareness that has been present for some time in the work of the magazine: that research in the areas of theory and history both imply a commitment to and in the present. The present situation prompts the exploration of certain issues, but it cannot be the only determinant upon more extended work. History and theory cannot be chained to current concerns because these concerns in their immediate manifestation may well be short-lived and can certainly be displaced and transmuted by a calculated theoretical intervention. Both theory and history have their own times and their own procedures which mean that they cannot be perpetually called to account by the present. What is envisaged is a process whereby the questions that are always raised (and equally can never be answered) within a particular reflection upon current events will find their elaboration and transmutation in other forms of writing which the magazine will continue to promote.

The multiplication of the forms of writing current in the magazine, together with a productive exchange between them inevitably raises the problem of writing and reading. What sort of writing will become necessary to promote access, and what sort of writing will remain necessary if arguments being put forward are to retain their efficacy? In the past *Screen* has been criticised for the difficulty of at least some of the writing it has published. We do not expect this problem to go away; indeed it may even become more acute as the range of concerns broadens. Greater accessibility does not mean that difficulty will be eliminated. The introduction of new discourses with different terminologies and different stances will inevitably create problems in that each discourse will have a specific

difficulty and — for many readers — a specific unfamiliarity of its own. There is a necessary unevenness here that cannot be ironed out except at the cost of suppressing the difference and the heterogeneous mix which the magazine seeks to promote. The production of a homogenised, ideally transparent style can only defeat the purpose of a project which aims to transform practices of writing about cinema and television. This does not mean that turgid or merely bad writing will be encouraged any more than it has been in the past. Difficulty has to justify itself and the difficulty there has been in *Screen's* writing (which has by no means been uniform) has been the product of specific requirements: first the need to introduce a number of unfamiliar terms, drawn from the discourses of semiotics and psychoanalysis, whose use was justified by the precision with which they enabled certain arguments to be handled; and secondly the need to promote arguments in a way which broke with traditional (and for the most part liberal-academic) formulations and modes of address. A lot of what has been called difficult in *Screen's* formulations of arguments has either been not so for readers who have wished to enter into a process of engagement with the text or has been so only in the sense that the process of engagement involved discomfiting shifts in the mode in which arguments could be absorbed. What was difficult was not so much the writing (or the reading of it) as the mastery of writing — not being given the chance to be confirmed in one's position of already knowing what one has just been told. The forms of 'easy' writing prevalent in our culture are based precisely on this collusive relationship between writer and reader. However impossible or vacuous the argument, the reader is invited to share with the writer a sense of mastery over it. To oppose this collusion it is often necessary — politically necessary — to be difficult, or at least to risk difficulty as a lesser evil than the facility of either academic or bourgeois-journalistic modes. On the other hand, there are times when *Screen* has simply not been understood, and this is a failing. *Screen* does not disturb the film and television establishment as it ought to: it merely irritates it. The magazine's refusal of the collusive, easily absorbed stance has been a major factor in its failure to produce a genuine questioning of the limits and limitations of conventional practice by its practitioners. With a wider and more varied readership to address, the magazine will have to be more attentive than in the past to the dangers of a difficulty that merely and un-

productively blocks understanding and hinders the development of a dialogue between the various positions within the magazine, as well as between writing and reading.

The most acute problem of misunderstanding seems to occur not between the magazine and its readership, nor between the magazine and its non-readers among critics and broadcasters, but between the magazine and some of those who conceive of its project as similar to their own. *Screen* is then criticised as though it were what it has never claimed to be: a marxist journal in the traditional sense. *Screen* engages with a variety of problematics within the overall commitment to a dialogue with socialist and feminist currents within cultural practices, particularly cinema and TV. The magazine has always given an important place to marxist arguments. But that place has shifted as arguments within marxism have themselves developed, both in Britain and abroad. However, the notion of a dialogue with various politically important currents demands flexibility and not the dogmatic adoption of the kind of 'marxist' standpoint whose limitations, particularly on the questions of sexuality and representation, require and receive constant questioning. So to criticise *Screen* for not adopting whatever set of 'marxist' postulates a particular author might at that moment have espoused is to misconstrue the magazine's project and its political commitments. Yet this is precisely the drift of the criticisms offered by Kevin Robbins in *Media Culture and Society* (vol 1 no 4, October 1979) and is also evident to a lesser extent in Andrew Britton's article in *Movie* (no 26, Winter 1978/79). Such pieces are evidence of an obstinate foreclosure of understanding for which *Screen* need bear no responsibility.

With this issue, then, *Screen* begins to inaugurate a process of change in the range of its contents and ambitions which is the logical continuation of the work of the past decade. We hope that this change will produce new articles and writers for the magazine, and that it will stimulate productive exchanges (possibly at the level of informal exchanges with the Editorial Board) about how *Screen* could contribute most effectively in particular areas of debate and struggle. Our new, planned format and design herald this changing project. Page design is both more spacious and more flexible, allowing layout arrangements that are appropriate to particular articles. We have changed our printing process to offset lithography whilst keeping letterpress typesetting and our long-established

Lectura typeface. We hope that lithography printing will provide an improved reproduction of stills and photographs. It is not our intention to use stills and photos as redundant illustrations to the copy as is the practice in most film magazines. We intend to continue the practice of providing stills which provide material that is directly analysed within articles; and to extend our use of visual material to provide statements that are in tension with the written text, or provide commentaries or revisions of it. Wherever possible we will continue to use frame stills taken directly from the film or televisual text, rather than employing publicity stills as though they were equivalent to frame stills.

It is not intended that there should be a new 'house style' nor even 'model writing' in the first issues of this format. We hope that new forms of writing will develop through engagement with current events, the assessment of particular areas of intervention, and the continued development of theoretical and historical work, all of which will now take place within the same covers. Crucial to the success of this enterprise will be our ability to involve new writers as well as new readers, and to encourage readers to become writers for the magazine.

This issue carries articles on a variety of subjects. Brecht's writings on radio have not been available in translation before — we present an account of this work by Stuart Hood together with Brecht's essay 'Radio as a Means of Communication'. With the British government licensing an increasing number of radio stations and considering licensing a 'citizen's band' radio, Brecht's ideas in this area, which he saw as:

a gigantic system of channels [potentially] capable not only of transmitting but of receiving, of making the listener not only hear but also speak.

We also focus on two important areas: independent cinema and feminism. Despite our commitment to independent cinema as providing a space for elaborating different modes of signification, different practices of production, distribution and exhibition, above all in more socially controlled forms, *Screen* has not given the area the attention it deserves. In this issue we give some space to practices of two film-makers associated with the London Film-makers Co-op, one of independent cinema's most longstanding and vital institutions. Malcolm

Legrice presents his current thinking on the theoretical framework to his film practice. Rod Stoneman draws attention to the importance of film-related practices of distribution and exhibition in considering some of the work of Mike Leggett. Independent cinema engages not only with the avant-garde but with the mainstream. Geoffrey Nowell-Smith's article on *Radio On* concerns the dilemmas of constructing a British cinema and engaging with the art-house market. We hope that future issues will discuss the components of that cinema and the operation of that market in some detail.

The Edinburgh Festival special event in 1979 was on 'feminism and cinema'. Lesley Stern reviews this event and indicates ways it has advanced understanding of feminist film practice. Pam Cook takes issue with Richard Dyer's treatment of sexual politics in his book on *Stars*.

We continue our commitment to greater coverage of television with a review of the current terms of the Channel 4 debate in the light of the IBA's much criticised proposals for that channel together with a review of the 1979 Edinburgh television event. We are publishing two pieces on Irish film history and literary culture: Kevin Rockett draws our attention to the hitherto unregarded area of Irish film production and its historical location. Richard Kearney reviews Colin MacCabe's book on Joyce, indicating how Joyce's politics of writing can be located within *Screen's* concerns. We continue *Screen's* interest in copyright as providing the legal institutional framework which determines the ownership of images and effects their circulation with two review articles of Bernard Edelman's recently translated *Ownership of the Image*. We hope to give a more extended account of the copyright issue in a subsequent issue of the magazine.

We would welcome contributions to the magazine, both short reviews, correspondence as well as lengthier pieces. With this issue Steve Crofts resigns as a member of the Editorial Board.

THE EDITORIAL BOARD

Society for Education in Film and Television Weekend School

CULTURE AND POLITICS.

London 9-10 February

The past decade has witnessed the growth of a range of 'cultural struggles' (feminist politics, anti-racist movements, radical aesthetic projects) which have called into question traditional conceptions of politics. A parallel growth of cultural theory has meant that strands of Marxist thought have been given a new currency in British academic and intellectual debates. The two developments have tended to remain separated, however: the term 'culture' has been defined in a range of contradictory ways and fitted into often antagonistic political strategies. This conference will therefore attempt to untangle some of the complexities of 'culture', 'politics' and their articulation in different practices and institutions. It will also consider what tactics and strategies might be appropriate in the present conjuncture, when the spaces for 'cultural work' within the terrain of the state are narrowing.

Speakers will include Francis Mulhern, Stuart Hall, Ernesto Laclau, Ian Connell, Simon Frith, Jim Greal, and Jean Radford. For more information and application forms, contact:

SEFT, 29 Old Compton Street, London W1V 5PL (01-734 3211/5455).

Screen vol 20 no 2: Peter Gidal — 'The Anti-Narrative'

We have been informed that the quotation on pp 91-92 of the above article was from an unpublished paper by Judith Williamson which was quoted in a context with which the author does not wish to be associated.

We have also been informed that the quotation on p 93 of the same article is from a preliminary script outline by Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen not intended for publication and to which we understand Peter Gidal as a member of the BFI Production Board had privileged access. The authors also feel that the manner in which the quotation appears may be misleading; they would like to point out that the words quoted are from a dialogue in the script outline and do not represent their own views.

The Editorial Board wish to point out that authors are responsible for clearing rights to unpublished material. We are extremely sorry that permission was not obtained for the use of these quotations and that they appear to implicate the authors in positions they do not hold. In addition we apologise to the BFI Production Board for the use of confidential material.

STUART HOOD

BRECHT ON RADIO

*We are for innovations but against
renewal* BB

Up to the outbreak of World War I the pattern of development in wireless communications in Germany was very similar to that in Britain. That is to say that although wireless telegraphy was well established, wireless telephony — what was to become radio — was relatively neglected. The possibility of transmitting speech as opposed to Morse existed but there was little incentive to develop the necessary techniques. Both commercial interests and governments — in particular the military — were chiefly concerned with the improvement of point-to-point communications and not with broadcasting. Thus in 1912 Germany erected a high-power radio station capable of trans-Atlantic communication and had added another before the outbreak of war in August 1914. The German government had foreseen the vulnerability of cable communications, on which Britain had a firm hold, and had decided to rely on wireless to communicate with its overseas embassies, with its High Sea Fleet and its African and Far Eastern colonies and dependencies, and for the transmission of communiqués and propaganda statements. The pre-war period was, however, chiefly, an era of diffused experimentation in which not only firms like Marconi (UK), Westinghouse

(USA) and Telefunken (Germany), but also individuals, amateurs or scientists, carried on experimental work on both reception and transmission of wireless signals, the great firms engaging in fierce patents battles as they did so. The outbreak of World War I changed the situation dramatically. Communications in the belligerent countries came under government control and supervision. In Britain, for instance, no one outside the control of the Services was permitted to possess a wireless receiving set and it was an offence to sell wireless parts to members of the public. On the other hand, the requirements of the armed forces led to considerable technical advances, particularly in the development of wireless valves, while the German army developed radio telephony to the point where broadcasts could be made to front line troops and were highly successful with them. Within Germany all radio installations had been placed under military control — a step which meant that when the Soldiers and Workers Councils were set up in 1919 this important network was in the hands of the revolutionary forces. The soldiers involved, following the example of the Soviets, broadcast messages about the aims and progress of the Revolution by wireless telegraphy 'To all' and declared the principle of workers' control of the network, which they wished to see made

independent of the Post Office. A protracted struggle in which the Social Democrats had the support of the predominantly right-wing Post Office officials, of the army and the Treasury, allowed the government of the new Weimar Republic to neutralise the situation and to avert what was described as 'Bolshevism in the German radio system.'

The coming of peace found manufacturers in both countries geared to the production of wireless components but without any obvious market. At home the British government, through the Post Office, made clear its reluctance to allow controls over wireless to be relaxed. The military and naval authorities thought it essential to prohibit wireless experimental work by private persons 'for some while' in view of Britain's proximity to a highly unstable Europe. (An MP spelt out what this meant by declaring that 'if transmission is allowed to everyone . . . the Bolshevik element would very soon make full use of the opportunities given to the detriment of the country'). In line with this view of the political situation in Europe, the Allied occupation authorities in Germany forbade anyone to listen to wireless transmissions although many people continued to build sets and to listen to chiefly those British transmissions which the authorities had grudgingly allowed to start up. Meanwhile the German (and Austrian) manufacturers of radio components found a favourable market in Britain, the post-war inflation making their prices highly competitive with those of British manufacturers; the buyers were the growing number of amateurs who were building their own sets, often using knowledge they had acquired in the armed forces. German competition was one factor that prompted British manufacturers to come together and found the British Broadcasting Company (its first managing director was an ambitious unemployed ex-Serviceman called John Reith), whose aims included the attempt

to obtain government protection against imports of radio parts from Europe.

The British Broadcasting Company was licensed to begin transmissions in 1923. In Germany things progressed a little more slowly. It was not until April of that year that Ebert, the Social Democrat President, had the ban on listening to wireless transmissions lifted as the result of demonstration of radio in his office. The lobby which arranged the demonstration was the German Radio Club, an organisation of amateurs who — as in Britain — played an important role in persuading the authorities to relax their policies. In Germany the leading members of the Radio Club (whose slogan was 'free radio', a formula in which 'freedom' was equated with private enterprise) had close links with industry and readily convinced Ebert that, unless transmissions were to be allowed and receivers sold to the public, the German radio industry would be at a severe disadvantage internationally. Opposition came from the *Reichspost*, which considered radio to be less a cultural matter concerned with the transmission of gramophone records and talk than a commercial one dealing with the transmission of messages; since — as in Britain — there was a state monopoly of communications, radio, it argued, should be in control of the Post Office, which did everything in its power to counter the propaganda of the Radio Club, even going the length of threatening with dismissal any postman who joined it. By the end of 1923, however, the *Reichspost* had agreed to make wireless licences available — at the prohibitive price of 60 post-devaluation marks. By 1924 there were some 1,500 licence-holders and as many more 'black' listeners. That same year pressure made the *Reichspost* relax its rules on experimental transmissions further although it still insisted on making licence-holders pass a test on radio theory and practice before granting permission to experiment. Finally, in 1925 in the face of strong resistance from the press and the Berlin

Critics' Association (who presumably saw in radio a threat to theatre- and concert-going) nine radio stations were allowed to start broadcasting on a regional basis. The *Reichspost* had a 51% holding in each station. Coverage was restricted and remained so for many years; as late as 1930 large areas of Germany were out of range of any domestic transmitter.

What had happened in both Germany and Britain was that the use of radio had been largely institutionalised. A wireless licence was in the overwhelming proportion of cases a licence to receive only. The manufacturers, who looked on radio as a way of creating a market for their products and/or using productive capacity built up during the 1914-18 war, had initially been prepared to finance broadcasting and pay for programmes; they were perfectly happy to see this task being taken over by state-licensed or state-dominated companies just as they were happy to see the cost of programmes being paid for by the listener through licence fees. The state in both cases had established a satisfactory system of control over the new public medium of broadcasting and had seen to it that the system was one that had no feed-back.

Brecht's first dated piece on radio was written in 1927 — that is to say, from a time when the process described above had already been completed. It appeared in the *Berliner Börsen-Courier* along with an article by the director of the Berlin radio station under the heading: Can radio programmes become more artistic and more concerned with actuality? Brecht's main suggestion to the station director was that he should attempt 'to make radio into something really democratic.'

What I mean is that you must get closer to real events with your equipment and not allow yourself to be limited to reproduction [by this he presumably meant 're-enactment'] or reports. You must get into important sessions of

the Reichstag and, above all, get into important trials. Since this would represent progress there is bound to be a series of laws to prevent it. You must appeal to the public to have these laws set aside. The fear of parliamentary deputies at being heard throughout the whole country should not be underestimated since it is fully justified, but you must overcome it, just as you must overcome the fear which, I believe, various courts will express at having to come to decisions before the whole nation. In addition you must carry out real interviews in front of the microphone instead of dead reports, in which case the interviewees will have less chance to think up careful lies than they have with the newspapers. Debates between leading experts would also be important. You can arrange lectures with discussions in places of any size you care. All these events you would have to cause to stand out from the grey uniformity of the daily menu of light music and language courses by announcing them in advance.

What must — with hindsight — be seen as Brecht's rather naïve optimism as to the capabilities of radio is very different from the tone of an undated and apparently earlier piece; but Brecht was never slow to contradict himself. In this piece he attacks the bourgeoisie's habit of overestimating 'possibilities'. 'No one bothers about the results,' he says:

The results of radio are shameful; its 'possibilities' are limitless. So radio is a 'good thing'. It is a very bad thing.

If I were to believe that the bourgeoisie will go on existing for another hundred years I would also be convinced that it will go on talking about the immense 'possibilities' which lie hidden in radio, for instance. These people who have a high opinion of radio have it because

they see in it something for which 'something' can be invented. They would see themselves justified at the moment when 'something' was discovered for the sake of which radio would have to be invented if it did not already exist . . .

I very much wish that this bourgeoisie would add another invention to their invention of radio — one that would make it possible to record for all time everything that can be communicated by radio. Later generations would then have the chance of seeing with amazement how a caste, by making it possible to say what they had to say to the whole world, simultaneously made it possible for the whole world to see that they had nothing to say.

A person who has something to say and finds no listeners is in a bad way. But an audience that can find no one who has anything to say to it is even worse off.

This piece bears the marks of having been written when radio was still very new, when what Brecht describes as 'a radio hurricane' was busy 'laying waste America' and it was considered:

a colossal triumph for technology that a Viennese waltz and a cooking recipe could at last be made accessible to the whole world. By stealth as it were.

In the *Börsen-Courier* article of 1927, however, he is much more prepared to accept the cultural function of radio. His criticisms are directed at the calibre of the artists employed and the manner of their employment, not to mention the fees for writers, which he finds impossible. On the subject of music he writes that:

one seldom hears works by important musicians from your [the Berlin] station

was he thinking of his collaborators, Weill and Hindemith? — and goes on to say that:

there is no point in having their works turn up in concerts or in bringing them in occasionally to provide background music for radio plays; their work must be performed in principle and they must compose works exclusively for radio.

As far as radio plays are concerned he admits that there have been interesting experiments but demands that only the best talents be employed and reminds the station director that 'the great epic writer', Alfred Döblin, author of *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (on which Jutzi's feature (Allianz-Tonfilm, 1931) was based), lives at a Berlin address. He ends with an exhortation to pay writers decent fees, to equip a proper studio and to be fully accountable to the public 'down to the very last pfennig' for 'the fantastic amounts' radio receives.

When these articles were written, Brecht had already worked for radio, in the genre of the radio play of *Hörspiel*, a genre that emerged in these years (the first German ones were broadcast in 1926) as the dominant 'artistic' form of the one-way communication process radio had become. Brecht adapted his own play *Man is Man* for a Radio Berlin transmission on 18th March 1927, under Alfred Braun's direction, and an adaptation by him of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, also directed by Braun, was broadcast on 14th October. This collaboration proved lasting—Braun directed a Brecht adaptation of *Hamlet* on 30th January 1931 and the first public performance of parts of *Saint Joan of the Stockyards*, broadcast by the same station on 11th April 1932. A recording of the *St Joan* . . . broadcast survives, but the others can only be hazardingly reconstructed from a few very early drafts in the Brecht Archive, contemporary reviews and the introductions Brecht read before the *Man is Man* and *Macbeth* broadcasts. These show that Brecht was experimenting with the application of epic methods in the adaptation of classical texts — the *Hamlet* in particular was characterised by ruthless cutting of parts and scenes

(Laertes and Fortinbras were excised, and Ophelia reduced to one scene, while the last scene was omitted entirely), introduction of punctuating commentary, sometimes newly written, sometimes reappropriated from elsewhere in the play, and rephrasing of much of the Schlegel translation of the verse.

Brecht's most significant, and certainly best documented, venture into radio before 1933, was however, the two plays for radio performed at the Baden-Baden music festival in 1929. These two are (in part) the result of a relatively long-term collaboration, with Ernst Hardt. In 1926, Hardt became director of West German Radio, Cologne. Before this he had already staged Brecht's *Edward II* at the Weimar National-Theater, and on 30th June 1927 he directed a second broadcast version of *Man is Man* for Cologne Radio, a version repeated on 11th January 1929, the broadcast being introduced by a discussion between Hardt, Brecht, Herbert Jhering and Fritz Sternberg. Alfred Braun introduced Hardt to Brecht in the Autumn of 1927, and after some correspondence about an abortive play about a Deluge (a favourite Brecht theme in these years), their collaboration led to the broadcast of one of the two learning plays with music that Brecht wrote for the 1929 Baden-Baden music festival, a festival with a special emphasis on radio and music. One of these plays, the *Badener Lehrstück vom Einverständnis* scandalised the audience and proved to be the last collaboration between Brecht and Paul Hindemith, who composed the music. The other was the *Lindberghflug* (*Lindbergh's Flight*), celebrating the Atlantic crossing by the young American airman in May 1927; it was written in collaboration with Hindemith and Kurt Weill. The fact that they were performed at Baden-Baden is a reflection of Hindemith's policy of fostering what he called *Gemeinschaftsmusik* and *Gebrauchsmusik* (communal or utility music). The former, as John Willet emphasises in *The New Sobriety*, his work on art and politics in the Weimar period (Thames and Hudson 1978), led on

to the concept of the *Lehrstück* or 'learning play':

A form of cantata or music theatre which besides teaching the pleasures of performance would serve as an exercise in social philosophy, the secular equivalent of a Bach passion.

The *Lindberghflug* was first performed on 27th July 1929 at the Festival, was transmitted to neighbouring auditoria on the 28th and broadcast by Cologne radio and networked to all German stations but the Munich one the next day. It was twice broadcast later before 1933 — on 5th December 1929 (with Otto Klemperer conducting) and on 18th March 1930 (a recording of this broadcast survives in the German Radio Archive at Frankfurt). A fourth transmission of the play was planned by Stuttgart radio in 1949. On this occasion Brecht gave his permission only on condition that the title be changed to *Ozeanflug* (*Ocean Flight* — the 1930 broadcast had already gone out as *The Flight of the Lindberghs*, to emphasise the collective character of the endeavour) and that all references to Lindbergh be removed from the text, because of Lindbergh's pro-Nazi sympathies and activities during the 1930s. The station did not, however, broadcast a production of the play until 14th December 1966.*

Both the *Lehrstück* and the *Ozeanflug* reflect the view of radio which Brecht

*Much material on the history of the *Hörspiel* or radio play has been published in German in the last twenty years. For a recent study containing a survey of this material and discussing Brecht's contributions to the genre in some detail, see Christian Hörburger: *Das Hörspiel der Weimarer Republik* (Stuttgart 1975). It is perhaps also worth noting here that Walter Benjamin wrote (or part wrote) some eighty items for the Frankfurt station and Radio Berlin in the later years of the Weimar Republic, only five of which have yet been published (see Sabina Schiller: 'Zu Walter Benjamins Rundfunkarbeiten' in G Hay, ed: *Literatur und Rundfunk* 1929-33, Hildesheim 1975, Walter Benjamin: *Gesammelte Schriften* Vol IV, Frankfurt 1974, and *Drei Hörmodelle*, Frankfurt 1971).

elaborated in a fragmentary piece written some time between 1927 and 1930. Entitled *Ways of Using Radio* it raises the question of how one can exploit art for radio and radio for art; these are, he points out, two very different questions which must be 'subordinated to the far more important question of how one can exploit art and radio at all.' The answer he gives is that 'art and radio should be placed at the disposal of pedagogic aims' and adds that 'the possibility of such direct pedagogic exploitation of art seems unattainable today because the state is not interested in educating youth for collectivism.' It is relevant in this connection to note that *Ocean Flight* is described as 'a radio play for boys and girls'. It comes after the *Dreigroschenoper* and is the first of a series of didactic pieces, which includes two short 'school operas' *Der Jasager* and *Der Neinsager* and that most politically austere of his works, *Die Massnahme*. It is possible to argue, therefore, that these two radio pieces stand at a turning point in Brecht's work and mark a turning towards the overtly didactic and overtly political.

Although initially Brecht had been critical of the idea of the *Lehrstück*, which Hindemith had invented for musical ends, he was by 1929 clearly convinced of its importance as a genre. In a piece on *The Theory of the Lehrstück* he defined its aims as follows:

The Lehrstück teaches by being played, not by being seen. In principle it is not necessary for a Lehrstück to have anyone in the audience; but naturally he can be made use of. The Lehrstück is based on the expectation that the person who acts the piece can be socially influenced by the execution of particular actions, by adopting particular attitudes, by reproducing particular speeches and so on . . . As far as the method of acting is concerned, the instructions for epic theatre apply. The study of the alienation effect (V-Effekt) is indispensable

In his notes on *Ocean Flight*, dated

1930, Brecht sets out precise instructions for its performance — instructions which put into practice the theory outlined above:

Ocean Flight is of no value unless one learns from and with it. It does not have the kind of artistic value which justifies a performance that does not have learning as its aim. It is a didactic piece and falls into two parts. One part (the songs of the elements, the choruses, the noises of the water and the motors and so on) has the function of making the exercise possible — that is to say, of prefacing and interrupting it, which is best achieved by the use of a radio set. The other pedagogic part (the part of the airmen) is the text for the exercise; the person taking part in the exercise listens to one part of the text and speaks the other. In this way the set and the person taking part begin to work together, the stress being rather on accuracy than on expressiveness. The text should be spoken and sung mechanically; there should be a break at the end of each line; the part which is listened to should be read mechanically at the same time.

What is interesting about these instructions — apart from the stress on lack of expressivity — is that the piece is apparently conceived of as a duet between a listener or listeners and the radio transmission of certain sound effects and certain choruses. These parts are clearly labelled *radio* in the printed text, whereas the part of the flyers (for they are plural) is not so labelled and is presumably to be read by the listener who joins with the radio in the final chorus to celebrate the fact that

*Towards the end of the third millenium
of our calendar
Our steely simplicity
Rose up
Demonstrating the possible
Without making us forget what
Has not yet been achieved.
To that this report is dedicated.*

Brecht then makes a statement on the duties of the state so far as the furthering of musical performance is concerned.

In accordance with the principle that the state must be rich and human beings poor, that the state must be obliged to be capable of much while human beings must be allowed to be capable of little, the state shall — where music is concerned — produce whatever requires special equipment and special facilities but the individual shall produce an exercise. The physical exhaustion easily induced by the mere listening to music, are distractions from the music. To avoid such distractions the individual takes part in the music and thereby obeys the principle that it is better to act than to feel by following the music in the book with his eyes and by adding the passages and voices allocated to him by singing to himself or along with others (a class in school).

The way in which *Ocean Flight* could be used and the employment of radio in what Brecht calls 'a modified form' was demonstrated, he points out, at the Baden-Baden Music Festival of 1929. Willer in his work on the period (referred to above) reproduces a photograph of what appears to be a rehearsal of the piece which shows Brecht together with the performers. It demonstrates very accurately the lay-out which Brecht himself gives in a note of what he calls *The Baden-Baden Experiment*:

On the left of the stage was the radio orchestra with its instruments and singers; on the right was the listener who, with a score in front of him, performed the part of the airmen as a pedagogic part. He sang his part to the instrumental accompaniment provided by the radio. He read the spoken part without identifying his own feelings with the emotional content of the text, breaking off at the end of each line —



Performance of the *Lindbergflug* at the Baden-Baden Festival (Brecht is standing, right)

in other words reading it as an exercise. On the wall behind the stage stood the theory which was being demonstrated in this way.

The theoretical text is not reproduced completely in the photograph but is clearly a variant on the statement that it is better to act than to feel and instructs the listener to hum or follow the text from a book or to sing aloud along with others. Quite how this division of roles was to be achieved outside of a studio or concert performance Brecht at no point makes clear. How, for instance, were the listeners to get the text? Was the broadcast to include gaps — like those in some broadcast language lessons — which the listeners would fill with their own spoken or sung performances? The questions are less important than the aim Brecht had in mind. *Ocean Flight*, he stated, must not serve as material for radio as it is at present but must change it. The increase in mechanical devices and the increasing specialisation in education — processes which he believes should be accelerated — 'demand a kind of revolt on the part of the listener, demand that he should be activated and re-employed as a producer'.

It is a typically Brechtian paradox that in his last note on *Ocean Flight* Brecht poses the question: Why can *Ocean Flight*

not be used as teaching material and why can radio not be changed? The exercise, he explains, aims at the learning of that discipline, which is the basis of freedom — an echo apparently of Engels' dictum about freedom and necessity. He goes on:

The individual, it has to be admitted, will reach out of his own accord for something that promises pleasure but not for learning material which promises him neither money nor social advantage. Such exercises benefit the individual in so far as they benefit the state and they only benefit a state which wishes to make use of everyone equally. Ocean Flight has therefore neither aesthetic nor revolutionary value independent of its being used; which only the state can organise. Its proper employment, however, makes it 'revolutionary' in so far as the present-day state has no interest in arranging such exercises.

The *Badener Lehrstück* also deals with the conquest of the air. It is a morality play described in its full title as being concerned with 'understanding', the lesson to be understood being that individual feats — like that of the pilot — are less important than the social contribution of the fitters who made his plane. At the end they are exhorted by the chorus to march with it and:

*To change not only
One law of this world but
Its basic law,
Having understood that everything is
being changed
The world and mankind
Above all the chaos
Of the classes of mankind because there
are two kinds of men
Exploitation and ignorance.*

In an introduction to the piece when it was reprinted in his *Versuche*, Vol 2 Brecht admitted that when it was finished the piece had turned out to be unsatisfactory; he had decided to publish it only because

it had been performed and had after all helped to organise a collective effort.

His last published work on radio dates from 1930. It is a statement which subsumes several of the points made in his earlier writings; in particular it makes explicit his view that radio might have a great deal to learn from the theory and practice of Epic Theatre. It is described as 'a talk on the function of radio' but there is no indication as to where the talk was given or to what audience. His statement that they aim 'to sell art through [their] sets' appears to imply that it was composed either of radio producers or radio manufacturers or both. Those who believe that the great broadcasting organisations of today can somehow be subverted from within should ponder on his final statement:

It is no task of ours to renew ideological institutions with new ideas on the basis of the present social system . . . These proposals cannot be achieved in this social system — can be achieved in another.

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BERTOLT BRECHT

RADIO AS A MEANS OF

COMMUNICATION

A TALK ON THE FUNCTION OF RADIO

OUR SOCIAL ORDER, which is an anarchic one — if one can imagine its anarchy of orders, that is to say a mechanical and uncorrelated confusion of complexes of public life, which are in themselves highly organised — our social order, which is anarchic in this sense, makes it possible for inventions to be made and developed which must first conquer a market, demonstrate their reason for existing: in short, inventions which have not been commissioned. Thus at a certain point in time technology was far enough advanced to produce radio while society was not sufficiently advanced to take it up. It was not the public that waited for radio but radio that waited for a public; to define the situation of radio more accurately, raw material was not waiting for methods of production based on social needs but means of production were looking anxiously for raw material. *It was suddenly possible to say everything to everybody but, thinking about it, there was nothing to say.* And who was 'everybody'? To begin with, the answer was not to think about it. One looked around to discover where something was being said to someone and attempted to muscle in purely and simply as a competitor and to say no matter what to no matter whom. That was radio in its first phase as a substitute. As a substitute for the theatre, for the opera, for concerts, for lectures, for café music, for the local columns of the press and so on.

From the beginning radio imitated almost all the existing institutions that had anything to do with the diffusion of whatever could be spoken or sung. The result was an inescapable profusion and confusion in the tower of Babel. In this acoustic department store you could learn in English how to keep chickens to the Pilgrim's Chorus from *Tannhäuser*; and the lesson was as cheap

as tap-water. This was the golden childhood of our patient. I do not know whether it is over yet or not, but if it is, then this youngster, who did not have to produce any qualifications in order to be born, will at least have to look around later on for an *aim in life*. In the same way it is only in riper years, when they have lost their innocence, that people ask themselves why really they are on this earth.

As far as radio's aim in life is concerned, it cannot in my opinion consist in merely embellishing public life. It is not merely that it has shown little aptitude for doing so; unfortunately our public life also shows little aptitude for being embellished. I have nothing against sets being installed in shelters for the unemployed and in prisons (it is obviously thought that in this way the life-span of these institutions can be cheaply prolonged) but it cannot be the chief task of radio to install receivers underneath the arches even if it is a nice gesture to provide those who wish to spend their nights there with the minimum: namely, a performance of *The Mastersingers*. This is a case where tact is needed. Nor does radio, in my opinion, suffice as a method of making the home cosy and family life possible again so we can cheerfully leave aside the question whether what it cannot achieve is in any case desirable. But quite apart from its dubious function (to offer a lot is to offer no one anything), radio is one-sided when it should have two sides. It is a pure instrument of distribution; it merely hands things out.

And now to be positive, that is to say, to turn to the positive side of radio, here is a proposal to give radio a new function: Radio should be converted from a distribution system to a communication system. Radio could be the most wonderful public communication system imaginable, a gigantic system of channels — could be, that is, if it were capable not only of transmitting but of receiving, of making the listener not only hear but also speak, not of isolating him but of connecting him. This means that radio would have to give up being a purveyor and organise the listener as purveyor. That is why it is extremely positive when radio attempts to give public affairs a truly public nature. Our government needs the activities of radio as much as the legal system does. Whenever the government or the legal system oppose such activity on the part of radio then they are afraid and adapted only to the days before the invention of radio — if not before the invention of gun-powder. I have no more ideas than you have of, say, the duties of the Prime Minister; it is the job of radio to make them clear to me; but it is one of the duties of the highest official in the state to report to the nation by means of radio on his actions and the reasons for them. The task of radio is not exhausted, however, by the relaying of these reports. It must, in addition, organise the demand for reports — that is to say, transform the reports of

our rulers into answers to the questions of the ruled. Radio must make this exchange possible. It alone can organise the great discussion between industry and consumers about the standardisation of objects of daily use, the debates over the rise in the price of bread, the disputes in local government. If you should think this is utopian, then I would ask you to consider why it is utopian.

But whatever radio undertakes it must endeavour to combat that *inconsequentiality* which makes nearly all our public institutions so laughable.

We have an inconsequential literature, which not only takes pains to have no consequences itself but goes to a great deal of trouble to neutralise its readers by picturing all objects and situations without their consequences. We have inconsequential educational institutions, which go to great lengths to transmit an education devoid of consequences and itself the consequence of nothing. All those of our institutions which shape ideology see it as their main purpose to ensure that the role of ideology is without consequences in accordance with a concept of culture which considers that the development of culture is already finished and that culture does not require a continued creative effort. This is not the place to examine in whose interest it is that these institutions are inconsequential; but when a technical invention so well adapted by nature to decisive social functions encounters such anxious attempts to keep it inconsequential and concerned with the most innocuous entertainment, then the irrepressible question presents itself whether there is no possibility of confronting the excluding powers with an organisation of the excluded. The slightest move in this direction would inevitably have a natural success which would far exceed the success of all the programmes of a culinary character. Every campaign which has clear consequences, that is to say, every campaign which really intervenes in reality, even at points of very modest importance, for instance the making available of public buildings, would ensure for radio an incomparably more far-reaching effect and a totally different social importance than its present purely decorative role. The technique for all such projects has still to be developed; but it will be directed towards the prime task of ensuring that the public is not only taught but must also itself teach.

It is one of radio's formal duties to give these didactic projects an interesting character — to make interests interesting. One area, the area aimed at young people in particular, can even be treated in artistic terms. This attempt on the part of radio to shape didactic material artistically would correspond to those efforts on the part of modern art which aim to give art a didactic function.

At the Baden-Baden Music Festival of 1929 I explained '*Ocean Flight*' as an example of possible exercises of this kind, which use radio as a means of communication. This is one model for a new

application of your apparatus, another model could be *The Badener Lehrstück on Understanding*. In this case the pedagogic part, taken by the 'listener' is that of the air-crew and that of the crowd. It communicates with the parts of the trained choir, of the clown and of the announcer contributed by the radio. I am deliberately limiting myself to a discussion of principles because the confusion in the realm of aesthetics is not the reason for the unparalleled confusion in the realm of principle but merely its result. The mistaken view — a very useful mistake for some — of the true function of radio cannot be corrected by aesthetic insights. Let me put it this way — the application of our theoretical knowledge of modern dramatic methods, namely of epic theatre, to the field of radio might produce extraordinarily fruitful results.

Nothing is more inappropriate than the old-fashioned opera, which is based on the inducing of a state of intoxication, for what it finds in front of the set is the individual — and of all alcoholic excesses none is more dangerous than solitary drinking.

Even the old-fashioned drama of the Shakespearean school is almost unusable on radio, for it is an isolated individual and not a crowd in close contact in front of the set that is led to invest feelings, sympathies and hopes in plots which have only one aim — to give the dramatic individual a chance to express himself.

Epic theatre, because it is made up of separate numbers, because of its separation of elements — the separation of image and word and of words and music — but particularly because of its didactic attitude, could provide a great number of practical hints for radio. But their purely aesthetic application would only lead to a new fashion and we have plenty of old fashions as it is. Were there a theatre of epic drama, of didactic documentary performance, then radio could carry out an entirely new kind of propaganda for the theatre, namely genuine information, indispensable information. A commentary of this kind, closely bound up with the theatre, a genuine, worthy complement to drama, could develop entirely new forms and so on. Direct collaboration between performances in the theatre and on the radio could also be organised. Radio could transmit choruses to the theatre just as it could broadcast publicly the decisions and productions of the audiences at the meeting-like collective performances of didactic plays.

I shall not elaborate on this 'etc' and deliberately do not deal with the *possibilities* of separating opera from drama or both from the radio play or of solving similar aesthetic questions, although I know that you perhaps expect that of me, since what you aim to do is to sell art through your sets. But in order to be saleable art today has first of all to be buyable. And I preferred not to sell you anything — only to formulate the proposal in principle that radio should be made into a means of communication for public life. This is something new — a proposal which seems utopian and

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which I myself describe as utopian when I say 'radio could' or 'the theatre could'; I know that the great institutions cannot do everything that they might do nor everything that they want to do. They want to be supplied by us, reinvigorated, kept alive by innovations.

But it is no task of ours to renew ideological institutes by innovations on the basis of the present social system rather our task is to move its basis through our innovation. So we are for innovations but against renewal! By continuous, unceasing proposals for the better employment of the apparatus in the interest of the community we must destroy the social basis of that apparatus and question their use in the interest of the few.

These proposals cannot be achieved in this social system — can be achieved in another; yet they are merely a natural consequence of technological development and of the propagation and formation of that *other* social system.

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GEOFFREY NOWELL-SMITH 'RADIO ON'

Radio On was co-produced by the British Film Institute Production Board and a German company, *Road Movies Filmproduktion GmbH* with additional finance from the National Film Finance Corporation. It was shot in black and white, on 35mm with a 'wide-screen' aspect ratio of 1.85:1. The total budget was something under £100,000. It is the most expensive film yet produced by the BFI. It is also the BFI's first international co-production.

The facts are simple, even logical. It is logical, if you want to produce a film on a larger scale than you have money for, to seek extra finance. It is also logical, given the absence of risk capital in Britain for a venture of this type (exactly what type we shall see later), that you seek extra finance mostly abroad, and consequently you look for a foreign market. It is also logical, given the state of the cinema market, that you seek a deal with television — which in this case is what the German side had to offer. The *Radio On* 'package', therefore, is for a low-budget cinema film, aimed for theatrical release but with built-in cover from a television pre-sale in Germany.

What is contradictory, however, from a market standpoint, is the fact that *Radio On* is wide-screen and black and white. This makes it a doubtful quantity for mainstream scheduling on television. Many movies, it is true, are shot in both television and cinema ratios. But *Radio On* is shot 'hard gate'. That is to say it has

already cut out, in camera, the parts at the top and bottom of the picture that television screening normally restores. To fit the television screen it will have to be cropped or scanned with the harmful results that all television watchers of old wide-screen movies can recall. A television 'investment' in *Radio On* is little more than patronage. On the one hand 90 minutes of minority air-time bought rather cheap: on the other hand a gesture by prosperous television in favour of an elder brother down on his uppers. German television has made many such gestures, and they have been very important for the cinema. Their importance for television remains to be seen.

Radio On, then, is emphatically a movie and, to be more precise, a low-budget movie. 'Low-budget' is written into the anachronistic use of black and white, the absence of stars (unless Lisa Kreuzer counts as a star) and high production values generally. The film is distinguished as a 'real' movie, however, by that strange quality known as 'quality'. It is not glaringly amateurish or ostentatiously avant-garde. It has all the signs of professionalism; or rather the absence of signs, since one of the features of professionalism is that it is not signified as such, the proof of its presence is the absence of any signs or symptoms that would prove its absence. More than that, the film is deliberately traditional. Although in some respects unconventional

(which, given the breakdown in cinema conventions in the past few years, is hardly surprising), it finds its break with convention on a conscious and eclectic recourse to recognisable cinematic and other popular-culture traditions. Its address to a cinema-going public is therefore unmistakable.

Nevertheless, there are problems within its cinematic address which are both textual, reflecting on the kind of film *Radio On* in fact is, and extra-textual, reflecting back towards the ideological and market conditions surrounding the project. It is here that the risk element in the package becomes most apparent. The risk in question is not simply financial: it is also — and principally — cultural.

Put quite simply, *Radio On* is a film without a cinema. It is a British film (co-production elements notwithstanding) inserted into the context of a non-existent British cinema. Its context could be something else — world cinema, independent cinema, road movies international — but in so far as a national context is concerned the vacuum is total. On an economic level there is no given market or circuit of distribution into which a feature of this kind can comfortably slot. On a cultural level, there is no set of co-ordinates laying out a profile of what 'British cinema' would actually mean in a period when very few identifiably British films are being produced — except, marginally, in the independent sector. And on the level of address, there is, consequently, no place to or from which a film can confidently speak, identifying its discourse in relation to either audience or content.

The effect of this circumstance is to make *Radio On* a very interesting movie — even more interesting than it would have been if it had been able to insert itself unproblematically into a given economy and a given culture. It also makes it a film which is not easy to write about, since every problem of the text refers to a problem of the context, and,

conversely, every problem of the context makes itself felt as a problem of the text, on which it is inscribed.

The film opens with a long, hand-held shot exploring an interior. In the course of the exploration the camera (which is the only attributable subject of the shot) fixes on a text pinned to a wall, and on a body, presumed dead, lying in a bath. The text introduces, somewhat cryptically, some of the semantic or thematic codes of the film, while the body suggests a hermeneutic: whose body is it? will we find out? Shortly afterwards the film acquires a 'hero' and it emerges that the body is that of his brother. The hero sets off for Bristol, where the brother's dead body has been found, and the hermeneutic of the film is to a certain extent set up as a whodunnit — to which, however, no answers are supplied. Meanwhile, the hero for his part proves to be less than heroic (in terms of narrative, let alone morally). He never finds out very much about his brother, and his picaresque adventures, such as they are, show him as essentially passive in the face of either emotions or events.

It might seem from this account as if the film is about an alienated hero or anti-hero, in the manner of those post-Antonioni art movies that have been not unfairly described as the soft-core of the *nouveau roman*. There are however a number of differences, slight but decisive. The anti-hero film elaborates its discourse around a notion of an alienated subject who sees around him a world on which he is incapable of working. The impotence of the anti-hero is, in a strict sense, subjective, since it is as lost subject that he confronts the world. But in *Radio On* no such subjectivity is ever established. The character is a character, sure enough, in the sense of being seen to initiate action (albeit minimal). But he is not the sort of Wenders/Handke character (as in *The Goalkeeper's Fear of the Penalty*) whose

'consciousness' is projected to form a subject-locus for the film. The subject of the film and of what the film enunciates is neither with the character nor with a consistent meta-discourse placing the character ('see how alienated he is'). Although the character keeps on appearing and the things that happen to him form a thread, the subject of the film is always somewhere else — with the camera, with the music or with the radio. These speak, and it is in relation to them that the character (the idea of a character) is spoken. The opening shot posits no character at all (except a corpse); the final shot loses the character to a small train disappearing into a West Country landscape; and in between an effectively narratorless exposition has processed a character-object along a trajectory of events.

The absence of subjective narration shows up at various points of the film. A typical example is a strange 'mismatch' in the scene where the hero is turned away from the nightclub. A shot of him at the door of the club is followed by what one would expect, according to the rules of classical narration, to be an eyeline match along the line of his glance to a point-of-view shot of someone he has seen, but is in fact another objective shot of him from a 90° angle. The cut is perceptibly 'ungrammatical' even if most spectators would not be able to say exactly why. Or again, more strikingly, there is the scene later when he and the German women go to the hotel, and there is a cut from the interior to a view of the hotel from the outside, with the man and one of the women framed in different windows. The point from which this shot is taken is known to the spectator: it is by the flyover on which the man drove into Bristol shortly earlier. This cut-back to a known point does not only de-subjectivise the scene in character terms, it also produces a new impersonal narrative subject, as if the film is (also) being told from the point of view of its own topography.

Radio On remains, however, a narrative film, and a film open to psychological (or psychological) readings. It is narrative in all the obvious ways, such for example as tracing a spatial-temporal continuum for the actions (however passive) of the character and beginning with the classical rupture of equilibrium (although no new equilibrium is ever restored). It is also open to psychological reading to the extent that its characters are coherent within the roles they perform in the actions. The effect of the ruptures of subject position I have indicated is not to destroy character as a feature of the movie, but to make its interpretation uncertain. This is nowhere more obvious than in the film's depiction of sexuality. There is, it should be said, no sex in the film. The hero is obstinately abstinent throughout. But there is a depiction of male-female relationships, characterised by a withholding on both sides. At the beginning of the film the hero abandons his girlfriend, who lets him leave. He goes and has his hair cut by an untalkative woman hairdresser. On the road he meets only men. In Bristol he breaks into his brother's flat to be greeted by brother's girlfriend with the words 'Who the fuck are you?'. He then picks up the two German women, one of whom, it turns out, 'hates men' — a concept for which it appears neither the German nor the English language has a word; the other, the Lisa Kreuzer character, he forms a friendship with, but any sexual opportunity that might have been presented is passed by. Meeting the woman's refugee mother-in-law he cannot stand her anti-youth prattle and walks out. Ending up in a bar he is physically assaulted by a woman pool player who thinks he is getting in her way. Meanwhile, as part of the film's residual hermeneutic there are frequent references on the radio to a pornography ring in which it turns out his brother was involved, and hero and brother's girlfriend are seen at one point watching some porno slides together.

In describing these events, or non-events, I am sharply aware of having in a sense mis-described them — simply by making the hero the subject of every sentence. This is an easy enough error, which arises from following the narrative continuity of the film. Actually watching the film, however, the scenes in question struck me as far more ambiguous than I have described them. Frequently the hero seems to be the victim of an aggression on the part of the women, for which he has offered no obvious provocation. (That is, there is no indication of a provocation offered, or felt to be offered.) On the other hand, the women act as if provoked, the source of the provocation being what looks like a total lack of receptivity on the part of the man. Which reading one makes depends, I think, on the extent to which the film makes possible an identification, not with the 'characters' but with certain subject positions that are, so to speak, triangulated between spectator-subject and the attitudes brought into play in the various scenes. A subsequent 'summing up' can yield the conclusion to some spectators that they are dealing with an unfortunate hero and/or with strong, independent women, but underlying any such summing up is a play of positions whose combination has only one consistent effect — the denial of erotic interaction.

The underlying problem of the film is that it allows itself the means of representing sameness and otherness, but not difference. The absence of any sexual positioning organised around difference connects with and contributes to the irresolution of the narrative. *Radio On* is a journey film in which the journey is undertaken, so to speak, prematurely, with the hero starting out from a pre-Oedipal, pre-symbolic position and never being able to surmount the obstacles whose crossing will get him to the other side — through the Oedipus and into the symbolic. Women remain other to the end and phallic narcissism reigns undisturbed.

The nature of the problem can best be

assessed by comparing the elements in the film which involve acceptance, reciprocity and exchange with those that involve aggression, incompatibility and paranoia. There are four moments of exchange in the film: the hero's receipt of a gift of cassettes from his brother, leading to the search; the sharing of a song with a young man at a filling station; a trade of information with a boy at a hot-dog stand; and an exchange of words in German and English with the Lisa Kreuzer character near the end of the film. In all of these except the last the relation is of like to like: the brother is the hero's double (note that it is a brother and not a father whose death provokes the journey); the hero and the young man identify with each other and with a shared fantasy; the boy is, as it were, the hero's previous self. Only in the fourth exchange is difference expressed — and expressed, significantly enough, around language. But this fourth exchange is as abortive as the others. Difference is unsurmountable and the woman — absorbed as she is in her own search, which is a search for her child — is unattainable. Every other encounter the hero has with women is, by contrast, clearly characterised by aggression and paranoia, usually on both sides. The sharpest example of this is provided by the scene in which the hero penetrates into the Bristol flat, expecting it to be unoccupied. Actually there is a woman there, who not surprisingly resents the intrusion. From his point of view he is invading nothing; from hers (or from our perception of it) she is the object of a phallic assault. Locked into this phallic and counter-phallic confrontation, the actions of the characters allow no space for the adoption of genitally identified positions. Again and again the structure is repeated of a self-absorbed maleness unable to engage with any counterpart. Hence rejection, stasis, irresolution.

It has frequently been argued that narrative in general functions as a means of holding together certain ideological equations, for example the opposition

active/masculine/male versus passive/feminine/female. From this has derived a variety of demands ranging from the utterly reformist (the shifting of positive identification onto different characters within a basically unchanged narrative structure) to the quasi-revolutionary (the abolition of all narrative whatsoever). More sophisticatedly, the demand has been made for a disturbance of subject position (in this example, sexual position) through a deconstructed or otherwise reorganised narrative form. Often cited in this regard have been the films of Chantal Akerman, in which the foregrounding of narrative or counter-narrative devices goes hand in hand with a reorganisation and disturbance of spectator position around discourses of sexuality. This comes over most clearly in *Je, tu, il, elle*, where the remnants of a conventional narrative structure (exile, journey and return) obstinately fail to add up or to yield any form of closure, and where 'character' is split into a speaking voice and a seen activity sharply at odds with one another. *Je, tu, il, elle* enacts various forms and levels of separation: the heroine alone, separated from the world, and herself separated into an activity and a com-

menting voice; the heroine separate among men, masturbating the lorry driver while he reminisces about his wife and family; the heroine with her woman lover to whom she has returned but who is about to throw her back into the street. The maintaining of these moments of separation makes impossible any narrative logic according to which the world can be ordered and character and spectator led to their appointed place.

What we get in *Radio On* by contrast is not so much disturbance as blockage. The trajectory is the appointed one: it is just that the character fails to pass through it. The key to the blockage lies in the impossibility of creating a point of view — the 'feminine' — from which sexual exchange can be organised, and the way round is found through the production of self-sufficient identities, mutually isolated but each available for narcissistic identification by the spectator. The mode is agnostic but not questioning. Positionality is not shifted but is simply abstained from. The terms of the much-questioned equation are not redistributed, but one of them is allowed to lapse.

Lack of position also characterises the directly political thematic of *Radio On*,

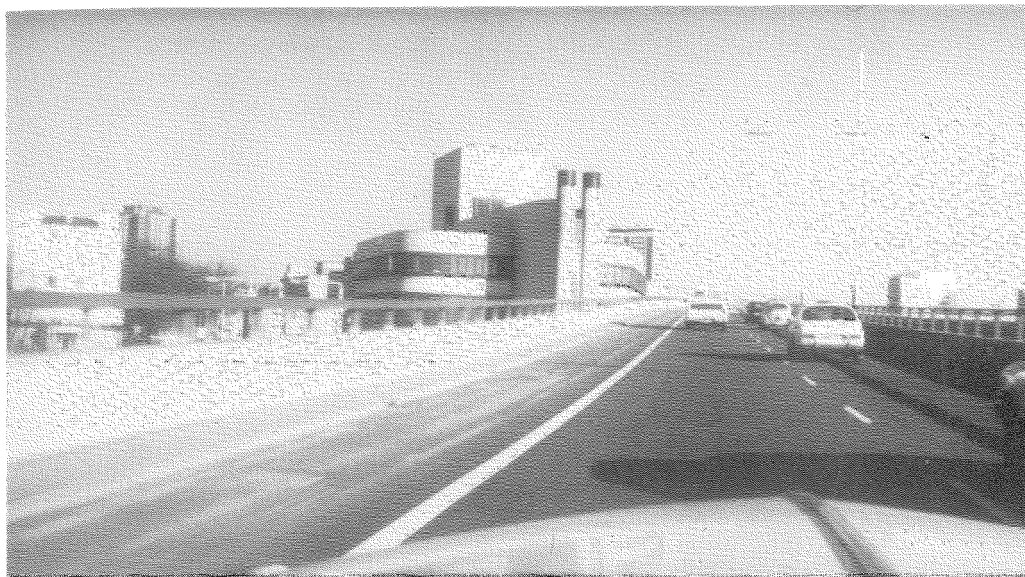


but with less negative results. Throughout the film Northern Ireland is a constant reference, present but other. Along the road the hero picks up a hitch-hiker who turns out to be a Scottish soldier who has just deserted from the British army. Meanwhile the radio keeps up a constant bombardment of bulletins and reports from the North. Interestingly, not only does the hero not take up a position in relation to the question (when he gets rid of the soldier it is because of the soldier's individual violence to him, not because of the army's violence in Northern Ireland), but the radio itself offers no position either. With admirable 'impartiality' the radio delivers stories susceptible of interpretation now from one political stance, now from another. At one moment it seems to speak with a Republican stance, at others it replicates the standard British and/or Unionist position. The bulletins and reports are brief and fragmentary. There is no way in which they offer a basis from which to think. Neither does the soldier. His voice — uncelebrated but unquestioned — is a sheer cry of rage and pain, from which nothing can be learnt. The deep stupidity of soldiering is here just a passively registered fact,

interpretable if at all as just one more shred of evidence of a world being dehumanised. The soldier's voice and the voices of the radio are a context of inaction. They flood in, not meaninglessly but with meanings that defy active interpretation. Nothing that they say inspires either participation or revolt. Their there-ness is in the form of meaning that is indigestible, that asserts itself without there being a way it can be assimilated.

Similarly with the music. There is a lot of music in the film, both motivated from within the story and simply present on the soundtrack — from nowhere. The music that is narratively motivated — cassettes put onto the player, or the Eddie Cochran song 'Three Steps to Heaven' sung by the man at the filling station — seems at times to offer a key to the action and its hermeneutic. The cassettes are those given to the hero by his brother, shortly before his death, and by playing them the hero appears to be searching for an answer — not that he finds one. More of an answer is provided by the Cochran song, a gentle crooning number of the wish-fulfilling type that British rock is particularly fond of. What



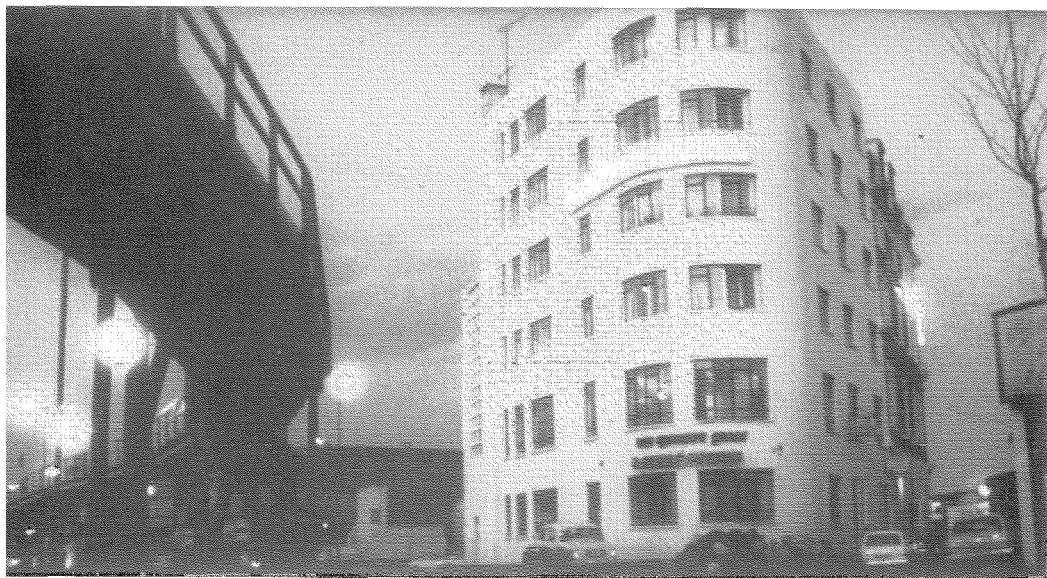


the song offers is a cultural reference point a return to an age of innocence from which one can look forward to the future. The seventies music elsewhere on the track is, by contrast, devoid of illusion. Definitionally contemporary, with no need to be laboriously recreated, it exists in an atemporal space, with nothing to look back or forward to. Switch it on, and you have the present all around you.

Music and landscape. As befits a self-styled road movie, the space of *Radio On* is circumscribed by its surroundings, heard or seen, rather than by its action. The periphery determines the centre, and the images and sounds external to the main action-plot can be seen as tracing a plot of their own into which the action is fitted and by which, in a sense, the action is programmed. Both images and sounds are a source of pleasure, and — in so far as they have their own principles of successivity — the pleasure they provide is a narrative pleasure. This is particularly true of the landscape shots, which have a distinct narrative order to them, linked more to the progress of the car than of its driver. As with the music but more so, the landscape shots have temporal connotations. The discontinuous shots of

motorway intersections, with older housing huddled beneath them, are the jumble of present-day London, but off the motorway and in the countryside the connotations are more explicitly those of the past. It is a past frozen into the present, and opaque. The past, it would seem, is recoverable only up to a certain epoch — basically the date of the hero's ancient Rover and early rock and roll. Beyond that it exists in the form of lumpy monuments, like the 'modernistic' house in Weston-super-Mare where the refugee woman lives and which seems as remote in its architecture as is the history of her flight from Nazi Germany. But narrativity is also resisted, and the sense of the landscape shots is often in excess of the contained meaning yielded by their articulation to the story. The final shot in particular, which lingers over the country railway station long after the train has disappeared from view, or the shot of the lit-up petrol pumps against a darkening sky, belong to a different representational order, and a different time.

The question now to be asked about *Radio On* is whether in its combination of elements — narrative (or counter-



narrative), music, landscape — it does something new for the cinema and the particular types of cinema to which it belongs. Not new for the sake of novelty, or in the name of originality, but new in the sense of producing a vectoral change in the kind of cinema we have. In particular does it, as an independent British production, do anything to reshape the context out of which it has emerged? To ask this is to ask a harder question than whether it is a good movie, or an original movie, and the answer if negative need not be taken as criticism. The question concerns not film, or a film, but cinema, and the terms of debate within which cinema is constructed.

It seems to me undeniable that *Radio On* is both a good and an original film (terms which I would regard as, in their context, perfectly meaningful). In many respects it is different and successfully different from contemporary work in both mainstream and art cinema — in its writing in of music, in its handling of narrative, in its incorporation of cultural references and concerns. These are real qualities — taken at their own level. But at the level of *cinema* the move accomplished by *Radio On* is less comfortably

established. The very characteristics which make it acceptable and assimilable as a film (and a film which will get an audience) also militates against its effectivity in the battle around cinema.

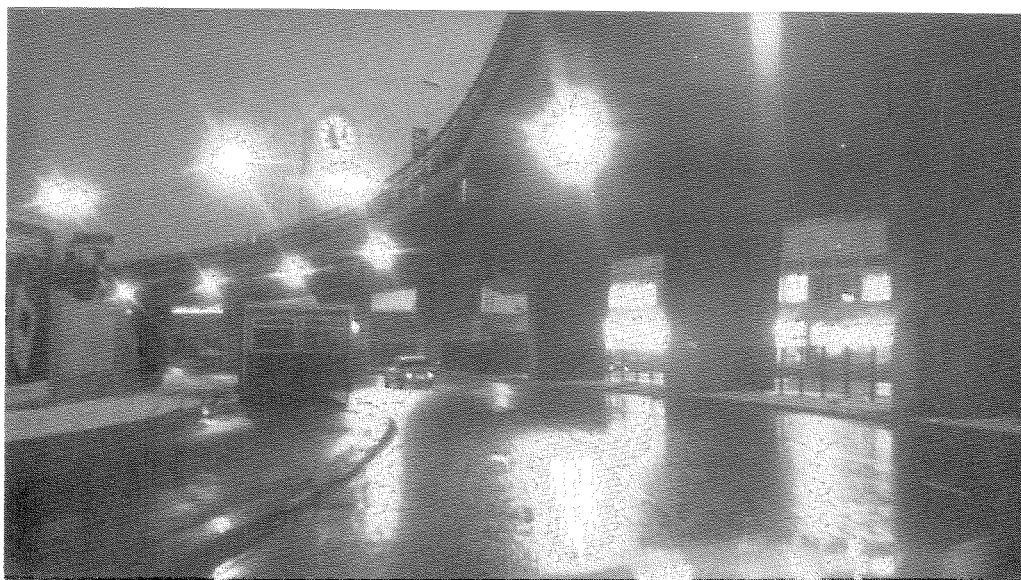
The struggle around cinema to which *Radio On* connects, but which it does not actually join, concerns two categories: British cinema and independent film. (It is important that these are seen as distinct categories, which the term 'British independent cinema' merely bastardises and confuses.) Independent film, at the moment, is both a separate production and distribution sector and a different discourse or set of discourses from the mainstream. Although there is a definition of independent film (promulgated for example by the Association of Independent Producers) which would make an 'independent' out of any film or film company not directly financed by the majors of the film industry or by satellites of the television companies, a far more operative definition (and the one I am using here) limits the term independent to a sector of work which is in every sense on the frontiers of cinema — in the language it speaks, in the conditions under which it is produced and circulated.

The frontiers in question are on two sides. On the one side is an open, experimental frontier towards new discourses, new audiences, new social practices of cinema. And on the other side is a fixed but contested frontier where two sectors meet: an established sector with one set of discourses and forms of circulation and an independent sector working to establish its own mode of operation along and across the frontier.

Among the bridgeheads that independent film needs to cast across the frontier into the established sector, theatrical release for one or more distinctly independent films is clearly one of the most important, and not only for the money it will bring in. But it is also important that the independently produced film carries over into its new context of circulation clear marks of the discourse — or a discourse — that singles it out as coming from that sector. Either that or it must put forward a discourse that is new and subversive in relation to both existing sectors. Failing this the film risks assimilation into the discourses of whatever circuit it enters into. The problem with *Radio On* is that in the last analysis it is the victim as well as the

beneficiary of its own eclecticism. Its discourse is not sharply enough differentiated to prevent its assimilation towards one or other of the cultural modes of consumption to which it allows space. Depending on the release it finally gets it will inevitably be absorbed, either centrally or peripherally, into art cinema — with an inflection either towards a music sub-culture or towards the mainstream film culture proper. It will be a British contribution to art cinema and to low-budget independent production, and this is not without an importance of its own. But it does not by this token open up a space for independent film within the sector into which it is released.

In relation to British cinema the situation is more complex and more equivocal. It is not a question here of moving an existing (progressive) discourse into new areas of circulation but of promoting a new discourse in an area where existing (reactionary) discourses are dying on their feet. It is not just as an industry but as a culturally defined entity that British cinema has steadily withered away over the past two decades. But in its disappearance it has left behind a scattering of connotative codes which



can still be activated — and which are perpetuated, if not exactly alive and well, in British television. There is an iconography of British cinema — to be more precise, British *realist* cinema — in which elements like pubs, rain, the seaside are heavily loaded with given connotations. The prevailing tone of these connotations is melancholic, at least where contemporary settings are concerned. (It is no accident that television ads for booze are so often set in exotic places or in the past: in the Edwardian age the pub was a jovial place, today it is not; anyhow the Bahamas are nicer). To escape these connotations is not easy. They are what 'realism' is all about, and *Radio On* as a realist picture does not escape them.



Neither for that matter does *Nighthawks*, another recent British independent production; and one wonders whether the complaints from people in the gay movement that it painted a 'depressing picture' of homosexual relationships might not have an absolutely literal base: it was indeed the *picture* that was depressing, clogged as it was by the iconography of British bars and bed-sits which it seemed powerless to transform or displace. In the case of *Radio On* the landscape and townscape shots, together with the broadcasts, are registered and, in the absence of contradiction between them, naturalised. Into this naturalised registration seep all the connotations — since the context is England — of British

tradition. Though there is a certain play with the connotations, and an attempt to introduce others (the petrol pumps have more of a look of, say, an Edward Hopper painting than of British movies), the resistance is insufficient.

The point is worth insisting on because there exists a demand, in certain circles, for the recreation of an 'indigenous' British cinema, that is a cinema which would be British not just in the sense of applying British capital to the employment of British labour, but in the sense of its cultural contents and self-definition. For such a cinema to be progressive, however, it would have to be capable of mobilising these contents and this definition in a way that it is not traditional

either to British cinema as it has heretofore existed or to British television. Either it must find a new content, or, if it wishes to work with the existing one, it must radically defamiliarise it. The demand for British life to be represented on the cinema screen is a futile and even reactionary one if all that is to be represented (however 'positively') is a set of stereotypical significations indistinguishable from those of television or past cinema. Crucial to the way anything is to be represented is a request to look again at both the object and the process of representation. When what is at stake is a cultural identity, which is connoted rather than stated, the act of stripping off previous connotations and affirming the identity differently is

particularly important, and difficult. Naturalisation, at the level of both forms and contents, is not only an inevitable result of time and 'tradition'; it is also, in the case of British cinema up to now, a self-proclaimed virtue. A progressive British cinema, sharing this new identity with its audience, can only come into being through a struggle against naturalisation — both against being assimilated into what has been naturalised in the past and against being itself naturalised in its turn.

If this is the case, then the relationship between independent film and British cinema is — hypothetically — closer than might appear. It is only in the independent sector that the struggle against naturalisation and for a defamiliarisation of the contents of representation is carried on with any force — though that force is inevitably blunted by the restricted area of release available for independent work. It is therefore at least arguable that the strategic aims of extending the area of independent film and of developing an 'indigenous' cinema are, in the present conjuncture, one and the same. The argument has to be treated with caution. There is no reason to believe, for example, that the mere diffusion of some recycled 'modernism' to wider audiences is going to have any effect whatsoever on anything. It is also the case that on television if not in the cinema crucial effects of defamiliarisation have been achieved by quite other means than those in favour among independent film-makers. One thinks for example of episodes of BBC's *Law and Order*, where the ultra-naturalism of the dialogue is absolutely non-naturalistic in its effect: whatever the 'intention' of the programme-makers the final result is one in which the events described are denied any normalisation. In general, however, it is hard to see where, other than in the independent sector, the strategies will be generated which will permit a 'British' cinema to be other than a rerun of what has been known before.

Where does *Radio On* fit into all this? In terms of a strategy of position its place is not clear, and arguments could be mustered to show that it does not represent an advance at all. But in terms of a strategy of manoeuvre, where one does not expect (or not yet expect) consolidated gains along a particular front, something has undoubtedly been achieved. The manoeuvre is a complex one, bearing all sorts of signs of tactical compromise — or maybe overdetermination: to what extent, one wonders, was the crucial verbal exchange between Lisa Kreuzer and the hero suggested, if not actually dictated, by the needs of co-production finance? As a manoeuvre it is also, again for tactical reasons, unrepeatable. What the BFI Production Board does with its next 35mm production, will have to be different and could be the opportunity to stake out a starting position on behalf of independent cinema that was not possible with *Radio On*. Meanwhile, in spite of being so much a hostage to fortune, *Radio On* has the value of a declaration, putting a lot of questions on the agenda. What will the profile of British cinema be like if it succeeds in throwing off the accumulated memory of the past? What identifications will be possible, which positions — sexual, political, cultural — will be available to be taken up, and which will need to be rejected or further questioned? *Radio On*, in its agnosticism and eclecticism, does not perhaps actively ask these questions; but it demands that they be asked.

'Radio On'—Credits

Director: Christopher Petit
 Camera: Martin Schäfer; Sound: Martin Müller; Editor: Anthony Sloman; Cast: David Beames, Andrew Byatt, Lisa Kreuzer, Sue Jones-Davies, Sandy Ratcliff, Sting
 Produced by the British Film Institute and Road Movies Filmproduktion GmbH in association with The National Film Finance Corporation
 Executive Producers: Peter Sainsbury, Renee Gundelach
 Association Producer: Wim Wenders
 101 minutes, 1979

ROD STONEMAN

FILM-RELATED PRACTICE AND THE AVANT-GARDE

I Introduction

THESE NOTES ATTEMPT to describe a number of extra-textual practices related to current avant-garde film work and to discuss modes of theoretical and institutional intervention and mediation open to independent film workers at this time. While these notes are built around a number of examples of the practice of a specific individual film-maker — Mike Leggett — they could be related to other film-making practices as well.¹ They are concerned with a particular tradition of avant-garde work within independent film with its particular forms and strategies of institutional work, textual deployment and contextualisation.

My concern in this article is to locate the meaning of abstract and formal work culturally — in relation to dominant forms of film-making and to recognise the terms of the production and reception of this practice. This example concerns work in art education which questions the structure and mode in which 'knowledge' is produced, displaces some discourses by introducing political and historical discourses on the production of meaning, and in this can be differentiated from other independent film work where film is used to reinforce existing positions within an audience (at political meetings, trade union meetings, women's groups and so on).

Most previous discussion of avant-garde practice has avoided consideration of the extra-textual determinants on its reception. ('As to the problems of confirmed audiences that old red herring is an old red herring' Gidal).² Screenings of avant-garde films are often accompanied by the film-maker themselves. The presence of the film's designated 'author' often tends to confirm the audience

in placing the film-maker as an intentional source of knowledge, providing, as well as technical information about the films production, resolution and closure to a reading of the film, interpreting the film for the audience.

Mike Leggett, a film-maker who left work in industrial film production and as an assistant film editor in the BBC to work in independent film, has been involved with the London Film Makers Co-op since 1969, collaborating in setting up the film-making workshop. He is presently teaching film part-time at Exeter College of Art. His most recent work, which is taken as a focus for this article, is interesting because of the ways in which his practice of accompanying the screenings of his films does not attempt to control the meanings produced by the audience but, on the contrary, works to provide other and contradictory meanings. This will be discussed below in Section II.

A rough breakdown of the screenings of Leggett's films in the period 1975-78 confirms the common assumptions about the traditional location and placement of avant-garde work within the formal education system: 45% Educational venues; 25% Galleries and museums; 25% Public venues (Film societies, cinemas etc); 5% Festivals. Art colleges dominate as an institutional base both because they provide venues for screenings as well as employment for a number of film-makers including Leggett. The problems of the organisation of international circulation and distribution of avant-garde films lead to the situation where the majority of screenings abroad take place as part of tours accompanied by the film-maker (USA 1976) or in other 'supportive' contexts such as *A perspective on English Avant-Garde Films* (Arts Council Touring exhibition) or package tours accompanied by other film-makers (Australia 1975, Sweden 1977).

II 'Sheepman & the Sheared', notes on the films

What follows is a provisional inventory of *Sheepman & the Sheared* — a necessary description of the sections of a film which has not been widely seen, followed by an elaboration of some of their structural elements. This examination of some elements of a textual system — Leggett's films — precedes the attempt to describe their function when placed in relation (to each other and) to various discursive contexts. The analysis of meaning production must start from an understanding of the interaction of text, context and reader as relative and dialectical ('the reading of a film is neither constrained absolutely, nor free absolutely, but historical' Stephen Heath).

Sheep — remains of a cut roll of rushes; images of sheep, splices, grease pencil marks, flash frames, marker boards and man talking to camera without sound (3 minutes).

1 A number of related independent film projects could be instanced as problematising the articulation of discourses and utilising notions of specific exhibition use: *Song of the Shirt*, Film History Workshop; '36 to 77, Berwick Street Collective; *Justine*, Film Work Group.

2 Modified quotation from *Wide Angle* vol 2 no 4, 1978, p 86.

Sheepman — assembly of same found footage plus more and including images of humans, motor cars and other machines. Governed by a constant 12 frame/half-second linear measurement of acetate and functioning as the durational basis for the selection and re-ordering of material originally destined to be ordered according to the dictates of an explanatory script (10 minutes).

Window — the camera and operator record 40 seconds of film each week throughout a period of 12 months from the same vantage point; each period finishes with the camera framing the area in front of the window in the same way as the shot commenced. Selection of the part of the area with the use of a zoom lens and camera movement or decision about the time of day (or even day itself), and precise length of run were not pre-determined. The footage obtained is assembled in the order of shooting, (April 1973-74), the cut from one shot to the next being preceded and followed by a series of single black frames(*) spaced 12 frames apart: *12*12*12*12 cut *12*12*. A twenty minute continuous sound recording made at the same window is printed twice on to the ungraded final print with a five minute gap before the repeat (45 minutes).

Film Lane — film is shot from a moving vehicle; from its roof pointing forward, from its rear pointing backwards. This occurs on two occasions: the summer of 1973 and the winter of 1974. The camera runs at either 24 or 12 frames per second. The film is assembled according to pre-determined factors: (i) the 12 frame basis observed in the *Sheepman* section; (ii) a double binary — alternating apparent movement away from and towards the surface of the screen (a function relying on the perception of successive frames), and alternation between opposing seasonal periods (a function relying on the perception of a single frame); (iii) combinations of one or other of these (18 minutes).

Farm — an assembly of eight rolls of film each in their different ways examining the spatial relations of the planes of the profilmic object to the planes of film in the camera and projector — the walls of a barn, the surface of a tilled field, the surface of a screen bearing the image of a wall in movement, the screen with an image of movement towards moving animals, movement of tractor on which a moving camera is mounted (25 minutes).

Blue Plus Green Plus Red — colour originating from the sky, the grass and berries, printed through a system of graphic loops designed to permutate the mixing of these three colours basic to the maintenance of the illusion of colour in film emulsion. The primaries, blue, green and red, produce magenta, cyan and yellow; and white as a hue shift (15 minutes).

Sheepwoman — returns to the camera image of *Sheepman* together with control of camera and then examines through systematic application the resultant image in conjunction with

synchronous/non-synchronous sound and written word image (20 minutes).

Sheepman & the Sheared is a large-scale project (2½ hours if the 7 parts are projected consecutively and continuously), the separate parts of which involve various articulations of related concerns — interdependent textual work on systemic organisation within a broadly structuralist/minimalist aesthetic inflected by the landscape genre . . . The size and shape of the text as a whole indicates its likely audience and its provenance — a national/cultural inflection of avant-garde work in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The meaning of the film includes its relation to other texts, it can be (and is) discussed as the work of an individual, but it should also be seen to be part of a wider process such as the discussions and productions of films among Co-op film-makers at this time.

'Film Lane'

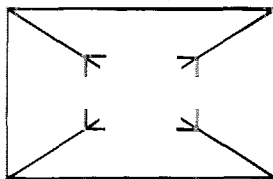
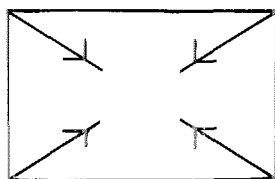
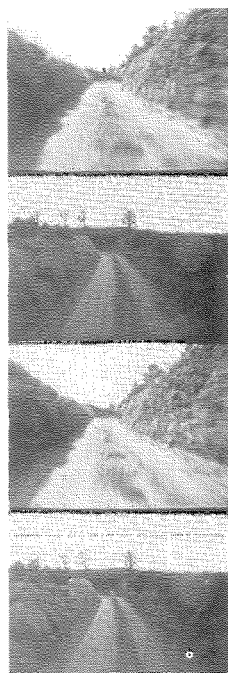
Deke Dusinberre has described the constitutive elements of the landscape genre within the English avant-garde film:

*Landscape films . . . assert the illusionism of cinema through the sensuality of landscape imagery, and simultaneously assert the material nature of the representational process which sustains the illusion.*³

The operations of the text counter the expressive and connotative meanings generated by traditional landscape art.

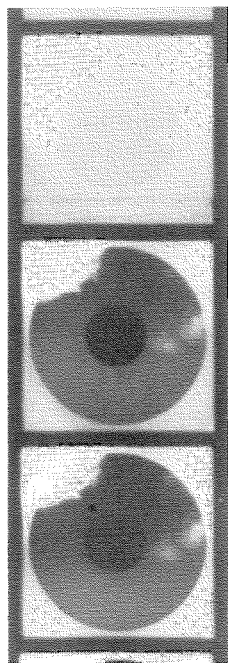
The construction of a unified spectator position in traditional landscape painting (ie, before Cezanne) through perspectival representation is countered in *Film Lane* which utilises a mode of representation which both demands and undermines the viewer's conscious construction of spatial relations. The alternation/inversion of separate tracking shots plays on the unstable relation between the picture surface and signified/fictive space. The interruption of frame to frame continuity becomes a disruption and a destabilisation of perspectival space which is intensified by the directional axes of the image (the edges of the hedges and the road) which focus on a central vanishing point.

3 Deke Dusinberre, 'St George in the Forest: the English Avant-Garde', *Afterimage* no 6, Summer 1976.



- 4 Jean-François
Lyotard, 'Acinema',
Wide Angle vol 2
no 3, 1978.

- 5 cf SM Eisenstein,
'The Dynamic
Square', *Film
Essays* Jay Leyda
(ed), London 1968.



A form emphasising that the signification of space is constituted within temporal parameters, to adapt a phrase of Lyotard's

*Movement . . . is given to the eye of the spectator for what it is — a simple temporal difference in the visual field.*⁴

'Window'

The investigation of perspectival signification, temporality and its relation to subject positioning is continued in *Window* Section on an extended scale. The repeated camera operations in the approximately 40 second units have the same relation to each other as separate frames (and separate sections): related difference. Their diachronic relations involve the changing conditions of ambient light over the year. The individual units are linear symmetrical structures (palindromes), each returning to the same point of departure. Their correspondence is constituted by a serial articulation of similarities and dissimilarities. Each unit performs and repeats a journey out into depth, the dimensions of which are challenged as they are constructed. The strategy of repetition (play of identity and difference) produces a focus on the detail of the profilmic event and the camera operation. The camera movement makes some attempt to decentre visual space by what can only be described as non-anthropocentric zooming — veering off the individuals occasionally glimpsed in long shot, disrupting implicit, and culturally determined, expectations which demand that visual organisation is centred on the human form if possible . . . 'Attempts were made to scan the view in a mechanical, non-responsive way' or more precisely non-responsive to the human figure. (Leggett's post-production analytical notes go on to suggest that this attempt was not pursued sufficiently to 'maintain an observational tension'.)

'Blue Plus Green Plus Red'

Blue Plus Green Plus Red plays on the 'origination' of the colour from directly filmed, primary colour natural sources (berries, sky, grass) and filter assisted modification of these colours in the printing process to create complimentary colours through the addition/combination of the primaries. The denotative functions of the individual colours are minimised by their duration and ring permutation — a succession of concentric circles within a square frame, as each colour is seen in relation to others. The resultant pattern/redundancy/variation is not arbitrary in principle, the variable loop length providing relative determinacy of the generative system (apparently aleatoric but within a predetermined structure). Perceptual structures by which we read/induce successive patterning seem to produce a repeated unit/cycle and pauses between sections of the film in which the colour seems to move predominantly towards the circular centre of the 'dynamic square' frame⁵ and to a lesser extent away from it.

'Sheepwoman'

Sheepwoman challenges the hierarchical ordering of the different registers of discourse in the dominant mode of representation by the separation and recombination of signifying elements:

Sound (of voice);

Image (of speaker);

Sub-title,

and their articulation through the interaction of repeated shots foregrounding a number of related factors:

1) Shot size, degree of facial closeness (determination of sync/non-sync).



2) Non-anthropocentric depth of field and focus.

3) Relation of the texts — The subtitle text initially follows the sound of the recited text and then preceeds it, but in both cases exceeds it by introducing indirectly related material, referring to off-screen space, which is not in the aural text.

The complex construction of sectional and intersectional relations is based on a series of shifts involving recombinations of elements; say, *Blue Plus Green Plus Red* to *Sheepwoman* — both sections involving the combination and organisation of elements through the interaction of repeated material, by loop permutation in *Blue Plus Green Plus Red* and by the repetition of three prints of the same two takes in *Sheepwoman*.

When shown by itself *Blue Plus Green Plus Red* tends to be read as pure colour abstraction, but this reading is countered by its relation to the *Sheepwoman* section which involves a related systemic mode of organisation in a more complex diverse and referential signifying system. In fact *Sheepwoman* fulfils the requirement formulated in Burch's *Theory of Film Practice*⁶ to define and

6 Noël Burch, *Theory of Film Practice*, London 1973.

- 7 A question raised by, among others, Anne Cottringer, 'Three Films of Michael Snow: the Politics of the Avant-Garde', unpublished Slade Diploma Thesis, University College London, 1976; Mick Eaton, 'The Avant-Garde and Narrative', *Screen* vol 19 no 2, Summer 1978; Phillip Drummond, 'Notions of Avant-Garde Cinema', *Film as Film*, Arts Council of Great Britain, 1979.

- 8 Mike Leggett, written reply to a question on the political functions of 'formal' film posed at a screening in San Francisco State University in October 1976.

separate the components of film form to allow their rigorous articulation by para-serial principles. The two sections constitute different modes of signification which are combined as related paradigms of avant-garde practice within a heterogeneous text. Their conjunction in the same text counters the traditional aesthetics of the fully integrated text in which all of the elements appear to be functioning economically together in a self-contained structure ('the organic whole') with a maximum degree of continuity, economy, coherence and linearity — both within and between the individual sections. The appearance of self-sufficiency and containment generated by a 'classic' text is opposed by a work like *Sheepman* which proposes other kinds of reading.

The 'space' between the elements of the film can be said to produce a 'relational perspective' — shifting concern from the material or conceptual elements themselves to the relations between them. Individual elements cannot be considered in isolation from the network of relations in which they are held, and the way they are articulated together in specific instances. The function of this separation can be theorised in terms of spectator activity — the relative degree of consciousness of mental functioning, an awareness of construction and positionality in the structuration of a differentiated field:

similarity/continuity : difference/discontinuity.

A signifying practice based on the production of conscious differences, interconnections (analysis) between elements can lead to the questioning of the unifying, totalising positions normally constructed for and by the spectator in narrative film and of the context of that operation. The notion of film as an operation or practice in which signification is produced by a spectator in relation to a text, a process of meaning production which also involves a reciprocal subject construction, has led to the repeatedly⁷ raised question — as to the mode of articulation of the subject in avant-garde filmic practices.

Discontinuities within and between sections in *Sheepman & the Sheared* problematise the relation of the spectator to the film and therefore go some way towards exposing the contradictions of the dominant and institutional form of that relationship.

The work of the film can provide knowledge of a process, the reader/text relationship is not constituted in purely phenomenological terms — mediated experience rather than immediate experience. Its production involved an interest in 'decisions affecting the relationship of the phenomena or artifact to those who experience it' and how it is placed in aesthetic discourse, 'politics cannot be contained within an artifact . . .',⁸ in fact the politicisation of the question of representation and its inscription in history.

It's this reintroduction of difference, unmaking subject identities to produce a critical knowledge, which renders modernism, like psychoanalysis (provisionally) impossible for the institution; it tips education towards anarchy, the possible space of other orders.⁹

Sheepman is a largely systemic work and offers a different inflection of the conception and role of the film-maker — the author is no longer seen as the creative source but as an effect of the film text. Working with a definition of systemic as a methodical/consistent arrangement (arrangement as either object or process), the features of systemic work are:

- 1) Retrievable generative system which accounts for the consistent arrangement of the maximum number of parameters (measurable factors).
- 2) Clear, consistent formal relations.
- 3) Signification which exposes its own process of production.
- 4) Replacement of spatio-temporal reference (representation of another time and place) with structures which stress their own time and place.

These features involve an extension of (the notion of) rationality — the 'unconscious' elements are worked over by a conscious process on the part of the film viewer, foregrounding the decisions involved in spatio-temporal articulation and material organisation ('stressing the structures it is based upon').¹⁰ This textual practice can also be said to offer a different articulation of the maker 'outside' the work, affecting one of the elements central to the relationship of the text to the spectator — often somewhat overdetermined by aesthetic critical discourses. This relates to the Constructivist notion of the 'art worker' as a scientific experimenter, which counters idealist ideology of the artist as transcendent individual who occupies a position outside (and above) society and its historical process.¹¹

Exhibition/Accompaniment

The insistence, among avant-garde film-makers, on control of film distribution is often extended to involvement in the circulation of the discourses within which a textual practice functions.

The critical context involves a series of discourses which serve to interpret, mediate and locate the film. They offer the terms in which the text can be read. A work of art, like any other cultural and social discourse, has no meaning outside of its context and a number of complex and reciprocal determinations operate at the point of meaning production.

The programme note for the screening of *Sheepman* in 'Perspectives on British Avant-Garde Film' exhibition, organised by the Arts Council in 1977 at the Hayward Gallery, outlined 'two of the

9 Paul Abbott, 'Authority', *Screen* Summer 1979, vol 20 no 2, p 53.

10 As Jorge Dana has suggested 'A systematic is the inscription of a passage of a work which never arrives at an authority' quoted in Anne Cottringer, op cit, p 56.

11 This position has been developed by Birgit Hein in 'Return to Reason', *Studio International*, November/December 1975 and 'The Avant-Garde and Politics', *Millenium* vol 1 no 2, Spring/Summer 1978

- 12 Ben Brewster, 'Structural Film Anthology' *Screen*, Winter 1976/77, vol 17 no 4, p 120.

- 13 cf Jurgen Habermas, 'Conservatism and Capitalist Crisis', *New Left Review* no 115, May/June 1979.

directions in which an overall continuity might be traced across the disparateness of the seven parts: formal strategies and autobiography . . . the second detailing 'the personal threads and biographical correlations' which could be drawn from the work. The film-maker responded to counter this reading denying the 'presence of a particular personality' behind the work and attacking the implications of an organisation of the diverse elements around the central (and transcendent) consciousness of the avant-garde *auteur* implying that the position from which these materials can be seen to cohere (overall continuity) is that of the selective, organising and intentional author. Whilst they were assembled by the author the unifying, totalising position (from which the inter-connections are made) can be seen to be that of the film-viewer. Confirming the film as the unproblematic product of a transcendental subject, and the ideologically dominant idea that a film is 'about' its maker, leads to the production of centred, closed readings.

Leggett's recognition that 'notes carry considerable weight and influence in the way they affect a film viewing' indicates the role of the general and specific frames of cultural reference within which any spectator exists.

There is no absolute guarantee in the text of a systemic film that it is not recuperable into the romantic and idealist categories of criticism such as the mystique of personal creation and individual vision. However that is not to agree with Ben Brewster's assertion that the 'marked attempt to suppress personal intervention in the process . . . merely re-establishes the artist as object of identification.'¹² The conflict over the terms in which a text is posed indicates the importance of the extension of representational contestation to the areas of exhibition/reception. In terms of the avant-garde film the aesthetic discourse can be seen to function to hold and neutralise the political or theoretical impact of a text. Aestheticisation is one of the primary mechanisms of cultural integration — the way in which oppositional elements of cultural practice are subdued and controlled — displaced into marginal sectors of the system.¹³

This process is exemplified by the programme note in the National Film Theatre booklet for the screening of *Blackbird Descending* at the London Film Festival in 1977:

One of the most accessible films to come out of the experimental area of cinematic exploration in recent years. The secret of its appeal is that it engages the viewer's curiosity and then challenges him [sic] to remember, really remember exactly what he has seen and heard. It assumes that people can have fun at the same time as they are absorbing an analysis of how time and space are constructed in the cinema.

What resistances may be offered to the incredibly flexible order of an ideology which is able to accommodate and integrate everything from Brakhage to *Jaws*?

III 'IMAGE con TEXT'

Discussion of the political use of 'formal' film can start from Ian Connell's statement that 'texts can be pulled into more or less any ideological space, they can be mobilised for diverse and even contradictory critical projects.'¹⁴ Conjunctural analysis can lead to that mobilisation of a signifying practice for a defined usage and place — a certain type of discourse that engages and opposes in a certain field of knowledge. Avant-garde work can be used in a context that disrupts the continuities and exposes contradictions in academic discourse.

Since the completion of *Sheepman & the Sheared Leggett* has been presenting work in the form of an illustrated presentation using tape and slide as a means of providing a background to the films shown which are described as the 'determined residue' of a range of activities in a specific field of enquiry. It is a format which, in conjunction with discussion, seems to be particularly effective with students and film groups — an appropriate form of presentation given the largely educational context in which the work has generally been placed. The inclusion of material on the production and reception of the films goes outside the implicit criteria of pertinence which govern discourses operative in art institutions, self-contained aesthetic discourses which do not make reference to structures existing outside the institution.¹⁵

IMAGE con TEXT attempts to reintroduce elements of ideological and political discourse to articulate some of the structures which determine the placement and function of avant-garde audio-visual practices at this time, producing an understanding of the processes by which films are financed and distributed. Posing a specific formulation of the present crisis in representation that attempts to break through the limits of contextual containment.

Components of 'IMAGE con TEXT'

A set of slides is used four times in the course of the presentation, initially alone and then in conjunction with a number of different 'voices over' which produce differentiation between a series of layers of history, modes of discourse.

Image sequence (14 late 19th Century photographic plates) combined with:

1) Ambient Sound.

2) Imaginary history specific to a fictionalised first person enunciated by a foreign female voice.¹⁶

14 Ian Connell, 'Ideology/Discourse/Institution', - *Screen* vol 19 no 3, Autumn 1978, p 132.

15 Exemplification of this approach, if it is needed, and the discourses which support it can be found in the complex ideological negotiations performed in Paul Sharits' 'attempt to guide students into truly filmic discourses' (sic) in 'A Cinematics Model for Film Studies in Higher Education', *Film Culture* no 65/66.

16 This relates to Leggett's *Erota/Afini*, a work (in both book and film form) on the circulation, reinterpretation and narrative interrelation of 'family snaps' as found photographs.

The departure came as rapidly as the fading of my memory in the years that have intervened — fortunately, I often think, since the loss of my dear friend a little while later . . .



- 3) Sociological/economic — plates used as illustration to a history
The common lands of England are subject to common rights including the free access to all commons, the right to graze animals over the herbage, the right to gather wood (estovers), the right to dig turf for fuel or housing roofing (turbary) . . .



- 4) Aesthetic/technical

Light sensitive silver salts in responding photochemically to the focused light and then the action of a developer these salts form the image which, approximately 70 years later,

has been rendered readable through a process of duplication, reversing, in effect, the tonal order of the negative . . .



This last 'voice over' is the recorded voice of the lecturer which both integrates these texts to the bulk of the presentation and privileges this discourse which is mainly aesthetic/technical but also includes the entry of political and historical analysis:



The institution of the Christian family as a basic social unit within society created the demand for representational evidence of this practice as proof of its cohesion and ascendancy.

The successive shifts of verbal meaning over the images are inscribed in social temporality (history as an order of discourse),

- 17 cf Nash and Neale, 'Film: History/Production/Memory', *Screen* vol 15 no 2, Summer, Winter 1977/78 vol 18 no 4.

- 18 Eduardo Sanguineti, 'The Sociology of the Avant-Garde', *Sociology of Literature and Drama*, Tom Burns (ed), Penguin Books, 1973.

- 19 Barthes, 'Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein', *Screen* Summer 1974 vol 15 no 2.

and the process of the verbal production of meaning on polysemic visual material is problematised by offering the elements and traces without a full exposition by a controlling discourse to locate and relocate them and to construct a series of continuities. This means that the spectator is placed in a position of thinking about both the presences and the absences of the text in relation to a set of histories, discourses.¹⁷ This goes some way towards producing the socially constructed and historically located function of meaning, and specifying the production relations of that meaning for an audience.

A number of films are interspersed — two sections from *Sheepman* (*Film Lane* and *Sheepwoman*) and *Pure Vanity* (an 8mm synch sound film within the same room over a period of 6 months), adopting a spoken notebook form, without providing a direct reading or explanation. They are merely placed in a network of oblique relations with other material — the image sequences described above and documentation including slide of 1) the South West Arts Distribution Agreement (outlining the terms of copyright, conditions of exhibition etc), 2) the Film-maker's Statement in *A Perspective on English Avant-Garde Film*, an Arts Council exhibition catalogue and 3) the London Film-makers Co-op Workshop description.

The function of such a combination of disparate materials is described by Sanguineti in *The Sociology of the Avant-Garde* as

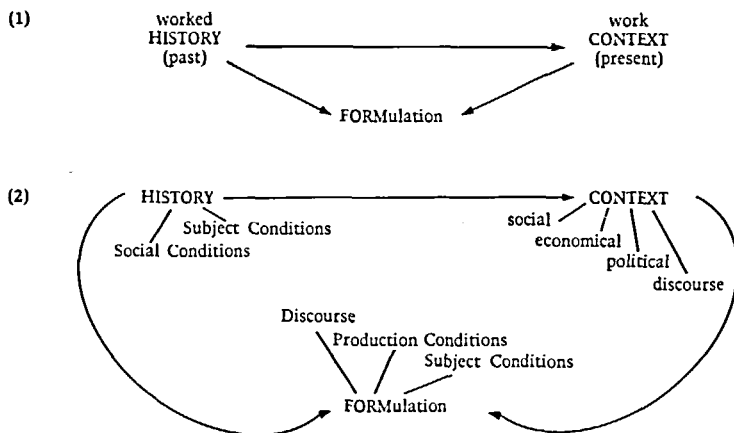
*the creation of an unbridgeable distance between the work and the spectator and hence that kind of practical opening up of the work in ideological terms which alone can overcome the limitations of contemplation.*¹⁸

and Barthes

*there is indeed an ideal meaning . . . but there is no final meaning, nothing but a series of segmentations each of which possesses a sufficient demonstrative power.*¹⁹

A number of slides of a diagram are shown at intervals throughout the programme, parts are added and it is gradually built up as areas factors and categories become relevant to the trajectory of the lecture. These diagrams are not utilised in terms of the degree of 'theoretical rectitude' that they might exhibit, but as an introduction of a number of determinant factors and a 'working' model for their relation.

The utilisation of diverse modes of discourse and incorporation of (traditionally) disparate material in a relatively uncentred textual system challenges their separation, ideologically produced



20 *IMAGE con
TEXT*

21 McCall and
Tyndall, 'Sixteen
Working State-
ments', *Millenium*
vol 1 no 2, Spring/
Summer 1978.

in institutional discourses. The conjunction of economic, social and aesthetic discourses with material on their conditions of production and reception displaces attention from the artifacts that have been produced, as Leggett suggests in the introduction to the presentation,

*these are simply the residue from a range of activities — it is more about the conditions which have perhaps been involved in giving them the form they adopt. So I'm not really concerned with discussing their peculiarities, their style, their minimalism, their formalism . . . or any of those things which could be used to describe their uniqueness or originality or any description which would seek to separate them, to distinguish them . . . the emphasis will be rather the opposite — to examine various activities and their relationships to the formulative process . . .*²⁰

A strategy which stresses these elements rather than formal aspects draws the meaning of the films away from their previous cultural location providing a new context for their reception. This can be seen as an attempt to oppose the ideology of 'art' cinema which contains and incorporates formal experimentation relative easily.

*Self-reflexivity has become fetishised in foregrounding only the material and creative process by which the film is made, while ignoring (and therefore mystifying) the cultural and economic context of the films production and exhibition.*²¹

- 22 cf Foucault, I.
Pierre Riviere...
 Penguin Books,
 1978.

- 23 Reprinted in
*Independent Film
 Workshops in
 Britain 1979*, Rod
 Stoneman (ed).

A whole web of relations is woven between the text and context — they support and contradict one another, modify each other... The presentation is a site for the intersection of discourses which differ in origin, form, organisation and function. In their variety and totality they do not constitute an exemplary text or a composite work but rather a truncated description of a contestation, a confrontation indicating a series of power relations that take place in and through discourses.²²

IV London Film-makers Co-op Policy

Extending the analysis of the function and placement of formal work in relation to a semi-autonomous institution such as the London Film-makers Co-op necessitated the formulation and implementation of policy linked to an analysis of its historical development and its position in the play of a number of institutional and cultural forces at the moment.

The employment of paid staff in the workshop has made the film-making equipment more easily available. However, widening the access and the scope of the facilities to people with less clearly defined projects has led to a weakening of the original coherence of the co-op as a 'tendency workshop' involving a number of film-makers working within broadly similar parameters. In the past it can be argued that it was this cohesiveness which enabled (a tendency within) avant-garde work to make an effective intervention in independent film culture and in the institutions of fine art.

Some of the problems associated with the reception and mediation of the Co-op's work are indicated by Annabel Nicolson in her introduction to programmes of 'New British Avant-Garde Cinema' for the Edinburgh Film Festival in 1978.

Critical attention to independent film-making has resulted in the singling out of certain film-makers by institutions, including funding bodies, anxious to present independent film-making in terms of individual achievements. History tends to ignore the ways in which ideas develop and focus on the events or forms, in this case films, in which these ideas are manifest. The structure of the Co-op is awkward for history to grasp and the film-makers' work to evolve a radical context should be afforded proper recognition as fundamental to the development of independent film-making.

At the Co-op AGM in October 1978, Mike Leggett presented a paper, the main lines of which are indicated in its extensive title: 'A Discussion Paper wishing to Raise on a Pragmatic Level the Problems of Screenings, Venues and Contexts; and on a Theoretical Level, the Issues of Functions, Ideologies and Institutionalisation.'²³ The paper re-examined the notion of a co-operative in terms of the

relation of film-makers to each other as individual agents of production 'wishing to extend the activity of production into the area of critical and political discourse,' and in doing so attempt to mobilise (a formulation of) history in relation to Co-op practice, to survey current developments and propose an analysis of the present conjuncture.

The 'specific and abridged' version of film cultural history (1966-78) indicated the changes in the use and placement of Co-op films, connected with the belated recognition and funding of the Co-op (founding of the Registered Company — the amount of work involved in meeting and administering funding requirements reduced the time available for long-term planning and broad-based discussion). A process of institutionalisation which also led to the substitution of films for their function and a small number of people appearing to represent the activities of a group. The paper stressed that the film-maker's responsibilities do not end with the production of a print for distribution and notes for a catalogue — this process merely allows new product to be incorporated into old relations, models.

Policy needs to be formulated in relation to clear notions of the function of the work, its audience and the role various discourses play in its reception²⁴ and include an articulation and negotiation of the problems of funding — the Co-op becoming merely a technical facility with a passive cultural function and an unthought relation (dependency) with state institutions.

In the long term further work will have to be undertaken on distribution and exhibition strategies, exhibition support for Regional Film Theatres and Film Societies, and the possibility of intervention in the Fourth Channel as well as further higher and adult education.

The presentation at the AGM led to the formation of a Working Party which met several times during the following year and produced a number of papers and proposals around the extension of control over post-production practices and contextualisation. They indicated the need for a Co-op magazine to provide information and critical/theoretical material on Co-op film-makers and to generate documentation for an eventual new Catalogue which could include general articles on the background, history and criticism and articles on specific areas of work.

It was argued that the Co-op's constitutional policy of non-promotion should not impede it from promoting and contextualising areas of work (and not specific films) — this would help to breakdown, rather than enforce, the existing selectivity which privileges the small minority of films/makers which enter public discourse. 'There is an inherent weakness in non-promotion which eliminates persuasion and taste-forming which are open to competitors' as Malcolm Le Grice wrote.²⁵

24 Peter Uwe Hohen-dahl, 'Introduction to Reception Aesthetics', *New German Critique* no 10, Winter 1977 is a particularly useful introduction to the problems of theorising this area.

25 'Some thoughts on Recent Underground Film' *Afterimage* no 4, Autumn 1972.

The working party also produced a set of guidelines on exhibition for both film-makers and Screening organisers, formalising aspects of Co-op practice on presentation format, publicity, documentation and accompaniment; and a suggested model for festival programming, specifying the processes of consultation and selection for both internal organisation and external representation. These questions were debated at an Extraordinary General Meeting in October 1979, leading to the adoption of the Working Party's proposals on exhibition guidelines, festival programming and the initiation of work on the possibility of a magazine, the catalogue proposal was modified and postponed.

Conclusion/Summary

The practices discussed in this article indicate the importance, in producing new and self-critical modes of intervention, of starting from an analysis of the traditions and history of a specific cultural practice and its relation to the structure of mediations operating in the present conjuncture. These notes have been concerned to address the function and effectivity of a specific set of texts at a certain historical point in time — how they function as an ideological practice, and the way in which their possibilities for effecting transformation should not be seen only in terms of form but also of audience relationship and social practice.

Leggett's work is taken as an example of a relevant attempt to engage with educational ideologies and the institutionalised discourse of art, important elements in a cultural system which works to perpetuate an idealist (modernist) aesthetic centred on objects and texts and to sustain a set of ideological and social conditions . . . An understanding of this process is necessary to the project of reworking and extending the role of avant-garde, and independent film generally, in terms of an oppositional negotiation of its ideological and institutional placement and function.

Mike Leggett Filmography

1963	<i>The Lark</i>	
1963	<i>From A Sleep</i>	
1966	<i>Crash</i>	
1966	<i>Strobe</i>	
1970	<i>Unword</i>	50 min (This, and the following films are available from the London Film-Makers Co-operative, 42 Gloucester Avenue, London NW1)
1970	<i>Sheet</i>	21 min (with Ian Breakwell)
1971	<i>Shepherds Bush</i>	15 min
1972	<i>One</i>	20 min
1972	<i>w Hole</i>	8 min
1972	<i>Tender Kisses</i>	15 min
1972	<i>Erota/Afini</i>	25 min

- 1970-76 *Sheepman & the Sheared* 135 min
 1 *Sheep* 3 min
 2 *Sheepman* 10 min
 3 *Window* 45 min
 4 *Film Lane* 18 min
 5 *Farm* 25 min
 6 *Blue Plus Green Plus Red* 15 min
 7 *Sheepwoman* 16 min

Video-work (available from London Video Arts, 12/13 Little Newport St, London WC2.)

- 1973 *The Heart Cycle* 25 min
 1973 *Porter Pack* 25 min
 1974 *Waiting Room* 15 min
 1975 *Eighteen Months Outside the Grounds of Obscenity and Libel* (Installation) 60 min
 1979 *IMAGE con TEXT*

Books and Articles

- 1973 *Erota/Afini* Beau Geste Press, Devon.
 1974 *Wayward Action*, Beau Geste Press, pamphlet documenting intervention against Westward Television.
 1976 'Considerations on the Subject of Interference', *Studio International*, May/June 1976.

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MALCOLM LE GRICE, TOWARDS TEMPORAL ECONOMY

Generally, avant-garde independent film-making has suffered from being provided with a history of its own (Le Grice's 'Abstract Film and Beyond' is not really any advance in this respect). What we need most is a quite different history, radically theoretical, something like 'Towards a Political Economy of Film Meaning-Production and Use'. Structural/materialist film' would have its urgency in such a history, a history that the films — and this is their radical, political actuality — ceaselessly suggest in the scope — and from the limits — of their practice.

Stephen Heath ('Repetition Time'),
Wide Angle 1978, Vol 2 no 3

INTRODUCTION This article maps the development of some of my most central theoretical concepts which have emerged in the period from 1965 during which I have made films. The lack of critical attention given to the direction of cinema to which I have contributed necessitates a lengthy review of the background to current concepts which inform my work. Even so, many issues are not examined in the depth with which I have considered them in other writings and the more

recent concepts introduced here are themselves sketched in for later development.

GENERAL CRITIQUE OF DOMINANT CINEMA
In an article for the catalogue of the Arts Council exhibition 'Film as Film' (London 1979), entitled 'The History We Need', I defined two aspects of theoretical statements on avant-garde cinema: the negation of dominant cinema; and propositions for the form of its alternative or replacement. Whilst all art movements tend to define themselves by their negation of previous movements and assumptions, the degree of opposition within experimental cinema to the predominant direction which cinema has taken has been far more fundamental than that which can be said to give rise to stylistic evolution within art. It is not my intention to trace the history of this opposition here, but because of certain developments in my own film work, which are also evident in that of some other contemporary filmmakers, I find it necessary to clarify some of the major premises of this opposition.

The dominant cinema is a narrative cinema. Even where it is a documentary cinema its overwhelmingly predominant form is narrative. Statements including

my own from within the avant-garde have tended to simply oppose as a whole, the 'dominant narrative cinema'. I would like, however, to distinguish the problems of its social function from the forms within which the films themselves work. By separating the question of the cinema institution from that of narrative form we can move towards answering a question which I asked in 'The History We Need': 'Are all aspects of narrative irrevocably embroiled with the repressive social function it has come to serve?' As I shall indicate, this question is in no way prompted by a notion of compromise between the avant-garde and dominant cinema but is made necessary by problems which are emerging within the by now substantial body of alternative avant-garde practice.

My main opposition to the dominant cinema institution is to the social effect transmitted through the psychological catharsis of its spectators/consumers. (In this respect I see the cinema institution as including all genres of television including games, news, and so on). The narrow limits of experience placed on working people by the forms and methods of capitalist production and their attendant social relationships are recompensed by the substitution through film and TV of a vicarious, specially mediated variety and excitement. Political and social pressures which might arise from these restrictions are released through this mediation, as Dziga Vertov put it: 'Film is the opium of the masses'. There is little evidence, however, that the social function of the cinema institution is significantly different in industrially advanced socialist societies than in capitalist countries — the viewer of film and television is in the position of an equally passive subject in both cases. This effect on its spectators must be communicated by the conventions of film construction, and embodied through the historical development of those conventions. Further the maintenance of this social function and the direction of its cinematic conventions

must be supported by the patterns and economic basis of cinema production.

Thus, my other major opposition to dominant cinema has been to its conditions of production, distribution and finance. The structure of the film and television industry permits access to production only to those individuals already predisposed to maintain that social function. This function is supported by the illusionistic codes of lighting, framing, sound, camera movement and editing, as well as the more obvious ideology of its narrative resolutions. Even though film production is intrinsically expensive, maintenance of the illusionistic codes excessively multiplies production costs. High production costs restrict access to the means of production to state and commercial interests as well as maintaining a division between production and consumption in cinema. Consequently cinema has developed as a mass culture at the point of consumption whilst maintaining an extreme elitism at the point of production. The conditions of production within the film industry have ensured that the concept of film form and the development of film conventions have remained within relatively narrow limits. If the avant-garde represents the only major diversification in film-form within cinema history, it does so largely through developing significantly different means of production, distribution and finance.

Opposition to the limitation of access to the means of production assumes the desirability of easier access (an end towards which I have worked in the London Film Co-op and on various committees), and which I have tended to describe in ethical, political and artistic terms. Ethically it assumes a broad egalitarianism; politically, it recognises the necessity for formulations outside those of predominant financial and state interests; artistically it is consistent with establishing the exploration of aesthetic form by individual artists and which has long been the prerogative of all the other arts.

FILM AS ART Historically, both in my own practice, and I think demonstrably in the avant-garde cinema as a whole, the development of alternative forms has not proceeded by a steady deconstruction or transformation, either in theory or practice, of the dominant cinema conventions. Theory of avant-garde cinema has tended to cursorily dismiss narrative, illusionism and identification together with the dominant commercial institution and to seek a basis for the development of a new aesthetic outside these forms, practices and institutions of cinema.

In 'Abstract Film and Beyond' (Studio Vista, London; MIT Press, Cambridge Mass, 1977) I have demonstrated how both the models for 'individual' based film production and the search for new form came from fine-art practice — in particular from painting and music. Though I have become increasingly critical of subjective individualism as the basis for art practice, my own practice assumes that the necessary integrity (integratedness, not sincerity) of the components of an art work is only possible through the rigorous and critical construction by an individual opposing the cultural coherence of established form. Though the *auteur* theory sought such conditions in the commercial cinema through the structural, thematic consistency of films by certain directors, it is only the avant-garde which has produced a film form where this integrity does not need considerable decoding from the predominant constraints of the industry. While financial constraints remain, the avant-garde mainly encounters constraints similar in kind to those faced by other serious cultural and intellectual work of the modern period: science, philosophy, literary authorship, fine-art and music. They derive from historical conditions of thought transmitted through language, or embodied in the psyche of the film-maker, coupled with those of the medium, its techniques and preconceptions of construction. I have suggested that the major shift in cinematic practice which formed the basis of avant-garde cinema was through engage-

ment with practices of modern painting and music. A fundamental assumption of 'modernism' is that the forms and conventions of an art should be appropriate and specific to the medium of that art. (In spite of a lack of any 'modernist' work in commercial cinema, its theorists from Munsterberg through Arnheim to Bazin have similarly sought to define this specialness and appropriateness.)

FILM AND MODERNISM There is a paradoxical problem in the early history of avant-garde film which emerges from this modernist enterprise. Assisted by photography taking up its representational function, painting sought 'painterliness' in the abandonment of representational space in favour of the abstraction of surface, shape, line and colour. Film, whose technical history is almost directly an extension from photography, first encountered the aesthetics of modernism through the influence of non-representational painting. Despite the liberating influence of fine art practice, I argued, in 'Abstract Film and Beyond', that if a 'filmic' basis was to be sought for an art of cinema it was not to be found in a cinema dominated by forms derived from music and painting any more than theatre and literature, rather than if a 'filmic' basis was to be found it should be sought in *cine-photography*, a position which I would now extend to include sound recording, stressing film as *cine-recording*. The main challenge to this position is that the very attempt to define a filmic appropriateness is essentialist. Peter Wollen raised this criticism in his article 'The Two Avant-Gardes' (*Studio International*, November/December 1975, *Edinburgh '76 Magazine*, 1976) where he countered the concept of the 'filmic' by that of an 'eclectic' plurality of codes. While I also have difficulties with the preconceptions of modernism, that does not invalidate the historical practice which has emerged in those terms. In film, this history (as represented by the 'Film as Film' exhibition and its catalogue)

constitutes the only substantial alternative to that of the dominant cinema. In film, as in painting, this development has concerned itself with an exploration, 'outwards' in a sense, from the materials and properties which can be defined as 'belonging to the medium'. The theory which has supported this exploration has frequently reflected an essentialism — terms like 'pure film' and tautologies like 'film as film' echo earlier concerns for *l'art pour l'art*. However, this is more an issue of faulty theorisation than faulty practice. The attempt to define the 'intrinsic' of a medium is always relative and historical. The possibility of postulating an autonomous film practice already rests on certain historical conditions. For example, the technological development of the materials and machinery is a necessary prerequisite, but as Jean-Louis Baudry alerts us in his 'The Apparatus' (*Communications*, no 23, 1975, English translation, *Camera Obscura*, no 1 1976), the form of this technology is already enmeshed in the historical preconditions of its social and psychological determinants. Instead of treating the properties, processes, machinery or materials of cinema as fundamentals or essences, their definition should be considered in terms of their place in the problematics of signification. Just the same, possible artistic functions remain for the denial of historicity. It could be seen as a primary justification for aesthetic activity that it resists meaning and signification in favour of experience temporarily outside history and psychology. Of course from the standpoint of historical materialism, such a concept seems untenable as any current phenomenon may be defined *a posteriori* in terms of its determinants (though the occurrence of that phenomenon may have been unpredictable *a priori*). In another respect any phenomenon will come to be seen in relationship to its consequences — in other words the ostensibly meaningless will become surrounded by meaning, will be given signification.

Leaving aside for the moment the problem of unconscious or unintentional inscriptions in a work, it would seem that the attempt to produce autonomous aesthetic experience depends on the resistance of existent signification. Certainly in my own work, and I think in modern art practice as a whole, is the fundamental assumption that already existing meanings should be resisted as they 'flood in' to the conception and execution of a work. I have tried to avoid both the Greenbergian consequence of this which tends towards the hot-house novelty of avant-gardist movements without concern for their significance, and the absolutist (nihilistic) demand for meaninglessness — 'pure presence'. Whilst resisting these consequences, I maintain that it is incumbent on the artist to produce a work beyond the predictability of existing meaning and form. While this does not imply a concept of mythical transcendence it does seek far-reaching transformation. Rejection and elimination of existent aesthetic solutions has played a major role in the process of formulating works. At the same time the 'positive' constructions which have replaced those rejected have often seemed arbitrary, irrational, impulsive and insignificant at their inception, even to the artist.

AESTHETICS AND POLITICS My concept of aesthetic experience has also been underpinned by ethical and political considerations. In this argument, politics is not to be sought within the *content* of the work — within its meaning or signification — but in its 'fact' — its resistance to signification in favour of creating aesthetic experience. In the process of resisting and negating existing constructions of meaning, a work determines new forms and resolves itself into new meanings. Dislodging the signifier from its expected signification permits a transformation of signification (and the possibility of experiencing some of the process of this transformation itself). Such 'work on the signifier' and its pro-

duction of new meaning is often a result of aesthetic strategies which stress presence over meaning. Here, the political argument becomes extended to the *significance* of the new meanings produced. Its articulation has asserted that the forms and structures of an art work can become models by which experience outside art can be organised. It has been a commonplace assumption that the forms of art represent the world: perspective represents the condition of spatial relations; narrative represents the sequential causality of human relations. The forms of these representations may be modified and radically transformed as in cubism for example. But understood more radically, cubism transformed not only the form of spatial representation, but, by implication, the structure which was understood to 'exist' in that which was represented. Even where the pictorial representation is abandoned as in the 'concrete' abstraction of Mondrian, I, and others, have argued that such work can be read in terms of a representation of 'consciousness' revealing an abstract logic underlying structuration. Though I would now avoid an articulation in the terms of 'consciousness-models', I would still maintain that the structures within art have implications outside art and furthermore that a major historical function for art is its capacity to formulate terms for the construction of experience (rather than simply its passive representation). Art forms experience.

THE SPECTATOR AND POLITICS From the beginning of my work with film my predominant concern has been with the spectator. My earliest definition of this problem identifies the general ills of audience passivity, undistanced and unresisted consumption and unconscious psychological compliance with the illusionistic manipulations in dominant cinema. I was concerned to produce an active, conscious and distanced spectator. The term 'spectator' gradually replaced

that of 'audience' in my writing not because of any implied priority for sight over sound but because of the connotation in the term 'spectator' of addressing an individual rather than collective viewer.

In analysing cinema (and television) as a social conditioning apparatus, the political validity of a basic demand of the 'rights' of the individual spectator seemed self-evident. The analysis opposed both exploitation of those involved in production and exploitation of the spectator in viewing the film. The film viewers, it was argued, had the 'right' to integrate and form their own concept and experience of the film. Though this came from attempting to embody a radical notion of democracy, within the aesthetic of the work, it rejected the expression of overt political viewpoints which were seen to manipulate the spectator. The behaviour of the spectator in relationship to the film was seen as more fundamental than any particular content. This developing awareness of the problem of the spectator which was particularly evident, though not always adequately theorised, in the European 'structural' films and in Fluxus work for example, constituted the most politically radical development of avant-garde film. Paradoxically it has either led to or reinforced the reduction of overt 'content' — the 'minimalist' tendency — which, in turn, has brought most accusation of a-political formalism.

The main obstacles to the 'active' engagement of the spectator, as it was formulated in the late 1960s, were identification with characters, the linear coherence of narrative development and the general illusionism of representational presence. All these cinematic illusions drew spectators into the action 'within' the screen space and time, and 'out of' the apperception of current reality. Withdrawal into illusory experience in cinema was only an aspect of a more general social problem. Cinematic (and televisual) illusions prevented apperception of the actual limits of experience and

effective social relationships of the individual and I sought a concept of film structure which could counteract this. My concern was to produce a materialist model of consciousness and perception within the cinematic experience using terms like 'politics of perception' (which led to a number of confusions concerning the priority of a relatively minor 'genre' of 'flicker films' within the overall concept).

In most of my films around 1972 the attempt to remove illusionism as well as eliminate narrative continuity and resolution, the tendency of the photo-cinematographic image to call up other spaces and times, demanded its gradual reduction and eventual elimination. In the elimination of narrative form (replaced in particular by forms of repetition) and photographically based cinema image, the image source increasingly became the physical materials and processes of cinema. Whilst this reductiveness, this negation of cinematic illusion, led towards an affirmation of the 'physicality' of cinema, it was primarily understood as focusing the spectator onto an extreme of the constituents of current reality. Such a notion politically sought the subsequent transposition of the capacity to perceive the limits of experience and effective relations from the cinematic to the world of the spectator. This motivation resolved itself in some respects similarly to the classical aims of 'realism'. It differed significantly however to *cinema vérité* or neo-realism, by rejecting the portrayal of 'reality' on the grounds that the narrative forms of cinematic construction unavoidably locked this enterprise into 'illusionism'. In this 'realist' cinema the conventions and conditions of presentation retained the spectator's passivity through their emotional identifications and so, I argued, the *mode* of their relationship to the cinematic spectacle went unchanged. The particular avant-garde enterprise to which my own work contributed at this time based its 'realism' primarily in the

spectator's confrontation with the reality of the cinematic itself. I was aware that extreme reductiveness risked the complete isolation of the work as an aesthetic experience within the space and duration of presentation. In my own work, even at the point when the cinematic image was most reduced (about 1972), my writing did not advocate an hermetic isolation of the projection experience but its elevation to 'primacy' within the overall consideration of film. I wrote, for example:

The Real TIME/SPACE at projection, which is the current, tangible point of access for the audience, is to be considered as the experiential base through which any retrospective record, reference or process is to be dealt with by the audience. This reverses the situation common to the cinematic language where experience of the real TIME/SPACE at projection is subsumed by various aspects of manipulated retrospective 'reality'. ('Real TIME/SPACE', Art and Artists, December 1972).

Though I would now revise the terminology, particularly the simplistic concept of current reality contained in the title, it is implicit in the statement that what is 'dealt with' through the spectator's present confrontation incorporates a consideration of those events which preceded and 'gave rise to' the current reality. In my film work, the attempt to reduce (and even at one stage eliminate) retrospectiveness which was foremost the 'once upon a time' of fiction, when extended to the implicit retrospectiveness of the photographic document, served mainly to close up retrospection to those features clearly traceable to the process of cinematic production. These included, for example, the transformation of the image in printing (as in *Berlin Horse*) and at its most extreme (in films like *Love Story 2*) worked only with changing colour fields on the screen.

My notion of film's 'content' at that time might be summed up as follows: The spectator, within the constraints of cultural history, psychology and psycho-

physiology encountered the film experience as phenomena which, from reflection on its materials, mechanisms, processes, transformations and manipulations in production as well as the spectator's own mechanisms of perception and conceptual structuring, became the 'content' of the work. In this respect the most fundamental distinction between this enterprise and conventional cinema became located in the specific mediations of the cinematic process and the 'active' reflexivity (since formulated as 'speculative/reflexiveness') of the spectator.

The aim, then, of initiating, within cinema a spectator whose mode of consciousness resisted illusion in favour of reality, seemed consistent with, and to depend on, a film form based on the actual substances, mechanisms and processes of film. Confrontation with reality was to be initiated in cinema by confrontation with the reality of film: its acetate, surfaces, the light of its projector, its screen and shadows, its space of presentation and in particular, 'duration', its concrete dimension in time. The concept of a materialist 'consciousness' for the spectator seemed equatable with the materials of cinema as did the materialism of the film-maker with their manipulation. A political aspiration led to an attempt to demonstrate and elaborate a theoretical relationship between film materiality and historical materialism. My film practice and that of some of my contemporaries indicated that the concept of materiality need not be restricted to physical substance, but could be extended to incorporate the material processes of cinematography, the properties of its machinery, the conditions of its presentation and the mechanism of its perception by the spectator. Whilst processes such as printing and developing the film image were not strictly *present* in the substance of the film at projection, their inscription remained (as a trace) at projection. Only in this sense did the retrospective become compatible with presence. Films which inscribed or did not efface the traces of

their production made their history and production available for consideration.

RECORD AND REALISM My notion of inscription as record (trace) and material presence extended to the incorporation of photorecording as one of its cases. The concept echoed Bazin's concern to root cinema realism in the mechanism of photorecording. In his essay 'The Ontology of the Photographic Image' (*What is Cinema?* vol 1, University of California Press 1967) he likens the process of photography to a death mask:

One might consider photography . . . as a moulding, the taking of an impression, by the manipulation of light.

The concept of photocinema which I developed relates more generally to J S Pierce's definition of one class of signifiers as 'indexical'. The indexical signifier is not tied to resemblance, but is none the less characterised by its form being a direct physical consequence of that which produces it. For Pierce, a barometric reading is an example of an indexical signifier. In order to grasp some of the problems of considering photography in the terms of an indexical signification we could pursue the concept of direct impression, say, taking a footprint in sand. If we treat the footprint as though it were a foot (through resemblance as a more generalised image) its indexical aspect, namely its condition of materially recording the trace of an occurrence, is diminished. This is to suggest that whilst the photographic recording may be considered as a form of indexical signifier, its condition as such is not simply assured by the mechanism of photography — its indexicality tends to be counteracted as its resemblance encourages the trace of an object (or event) to be treated as the object itself. This might account for the need to eliminate the photo-cinematic as a representation before its condition as record (within the concept of index) could be re-introduced to my work (*White Field*).

Duration), following a realisation that even the extreme reduction of the cinematic to the materially present did not eliminate its place in an historical continuum — its present was a consequence of its process of production some of whose traces were evident. The general problem of the pro-filmic became then one of material integration through 'traceability'. In other words, the primacy of the materially present was maintained over the retrospective through stressing the *specificity* of the trace of the retrospective in projection. Where Bazin assumed an automatic (transparent) credibility between photo-recording and a generalised reality of the 'object' photographed, I was concerned only with the limited credibility brought about by particular relationships within the specific limits of cinematographic recording. The physical-chemical coherence of the process of tracing the light pattern (or sound pattern) may demonstrate the material continuity between reality and record, but, however extended the parameters of recording may become (colour, 3D, ultra-wide screen), the recorded trace remains within specific limits. Access from the record to the object of the record is only to those aspects of the real available within those limits. One major level of cinematic illusion rests on treating the limited trace (a specific record) beyond those limits as a representation of a generalised or whole reality. The status and form then of cinematic representation becomes problematic not automatic. The material continuity between a real other-where, other-when, through the specifics of its trace reinforces the argument that if we are to use the terms of 'realism' in the field of representation it is more appropriate to concentrate on the concept of the 'reality of the trace' than the 'representation of reality'. My own theorisation, from a similar basis and motivation to Bazin (the desired supremacy of realism over illusionism), has tended towards much more defined limits for film's capacity to bring cinematic

representation into a relationship with pro-filmic reality — demanding a distinction between recording (a mechanical, physical, chemical process within specific parameters) and the more generalised concept of representation.

Assessing the credibility and veracity of a cinematic representation rests on recognising the definition of the specificity of filmic mediation as real in itself. However, definition of the specificity of film as material and as mediation is itself problematic. I suggested earlier that a major feature of the avant-garde cinema was its attempt to locate, and locate itself within, the special and intrinsic terms of the medium. I also suggested that whilst this has been theorised and criticised as idealist, essentialist or reductivist, evidence from this enterprise indicates that the very definition of 'intrinsic' is in extending transformation. This transformation proceeds both by the extension of the potentialities of the medium in the practice of film and by a critical (in the sense as crucial) grasp of the condition of its current historical determinants. I predicated my discussion of film materiality on the desirability of a confrontation of the spectator with reality in the film situation. I have recently found it necessary to distinguish and clarify the roles and status of film-maker and spectator in this discourse. The attempt to elevate the status of the spectator has required a reconsideration of the authority of the film and the status of authorship of the film-maker. The introduction of this problem into the avant-garde cinema must be seen in its historical context.

STRUCTURE-APPARATUS-SPECTATOR

Particularly in America (but also evident in the *aims* of the European *nouvelle-vague*), the development of avant-garde cinema post 1940 was primarily supported by the notion of the individual artist, and the personal expressive film. Partly in general reaction to the idiosyncratic consequences of extreme subjectiveness, partly in recognition of the impossibility

of artistic construction un-mediated by constraints of history and conventions and materials of the medium, the mid-1960s saw a tendency to consider form before expression (loosely dubbed 'structural film'). In my case, this general shift away from romantic individualism was related to an ethic which opposed the subjugation of the spectator to the personality of the artist almost as strongly as it opposed subjugation to the authority of the state or corporate cinema. The 'structural' film is rarely understood in these terms, because of the residue of the tradition of personal cinema, instead of seeking to express the film-maker's special vision it tended towards the anonymity of a definable structuring concept. In various ways from the application of strict system through to relatively determined strategies of film construction, the principles of a film's structure, it was argued, could be differentiated from the subjectivity of the film-maker. Exploration of the potentialities of film mediation, rather than the life and personality of the film-maker, tended to become the primary 'content'. By locating 'content' as the exploration of 'the medium' the film mediates 'culture' for both film-maker and spectator and the film 'work' becomes predominant over the personality of the film-maker.

Predetermination of a system or strategy does not however eliminate subjectivity but tends to shift its terrain. The film-maker must still devise the structural principle, select its form of application in the film construct and the components of its image. Moreover, if these factors are not seen as problematic or if the condition of the spectator in the whole discourse is not considered, the system or strategy may become no more than a convenient mechanism for the generation of a film. The apparent neutrality of the film's manipulations masks the problematic relationship between the spectator and the authority of the film. Even where the film attempts to locate its 'content' in the exploration of film mediation itself, the film-maker's discourse remains

privileged. This privilege derives from the access to the means of structuration and this cinematic cultural transformation. In other words, a difference in status and role remains even where attempts are made to diminish this difference in a relocation of film's content out of the film-maker's autobiography and into a more public discourse. There is in this an implicit attempt to shift the enunciation from the first person singular — 'I' — to the first person plural — 'we'. The 'we' implies the attempted co-location of film-maker and spectator in the constraints of the discourse. However, the film-maker, in adopting the first person plural enunciation, is placed thereby in the role of the spectator's 'representative' in the transformation of determinants through structuration of the film. If this role as representative is accepted unproblematically the spectator is turned back towards passively consuming the formal manoeuvres of the film-maker in this seemingly neutral arena — the 'we' becomes a subterfuge.

On the other hand, a concern of the film-maker which seeks to counter the passivity of the spectator does not in itself guarantee that effect, particularly if fundamental conventions of cinema and even its basic apparatus can be shown to be predicated on this passivity. The most challenging and interesting development of film theory to emerge from France in recent years derives from Baudry's article 'The Apparatus' (op cit) and Christian Metz 'The Imaginary Signifier' (*Screen*, Summer 1975 vol 16 no 2), which elaborates the notion that the invention and form of the cinematic apparatus is already determined within certain ideological and psychological structures. That the machinery of cinema — camera, lens, projector — its modes of functioning and preconceptions of presentation, embody and transmit deeply rooted determinations seems undeniable. My major disagreement with this position is with the critical tone which presents these basic ideological and psychological effects as not susceptible

to any transformation by the practice of cinema. Because Metz's frame of reference is almost exclusively that of the dominant commercial cinema whose forms exploit and compound the passive psychological disposition of the spectator, his analysis is drawn towards a terminology which suggests that the psychological condition of the spectator is forever fixed by the apparatus. He locates the spectator's identification with the self as more primary than that of the identification with characters portrayed in the film. This parallels my own contention that the apparent major content (a film's portrayed action) is subsidiary in its effect to more deeply embedded relations between film structure and the condition of the spectator. Metz, however, is specific in his description of the location of this most primary identification, he says:

The spectator identifies with himself, with himself as a pure act of perception . . . as a kind of transcendental subject.

Fundamental to his concept is the notion that the spectator is the

constitutive instance . . . of the cinema signifier (it is I who make the film).

Metz recognises that the spectator's implicit 'it is I who make the film' is a psychological reaction to support the ego in the face of an opposite condition — powerlessness to intervene. He traces the basis of this psychological disposition (with the aid of Lacan's concept of the 'mirror phase') to a certain stage in experience when the child could see, but not intervene in the (sexual) relationship between parents. This classic voyeurism whereby powerlessness is accommodated through the psychological formation which equates vision with control, expressed by Metz in the epithet 'All perceiving, all powerful' is put forward as absolutely fundamental to the condition of cinema.

Metz's analysis is evidently valuable in defining the predominant condition

of the spectator in conventional cinema. Modified, it can also assist us to grasp the determination of spectator conditions which derive from the apparatus of cinema, in particular from the basic authority relations implicit in the difference in role and status between film-maker and spectator in avant-garde practice. Though Metz refers to the social sanction of voyeurism within the cinema institution, he neither draws our attention to the particular historical and economic conditions which give the power and status to this authorisation and thus determine its form, nor does he give any hint that the predominant psychological conditions which it engenders and rests on can be dislodged by developments in film form or changes in the cinema institution.

My practice, which seeks to counteract the passivity of the spectator and bring the cinematic experience into the context of reality, opposes an analysis which leads to an assumption that cinema is inevitably locked in voyeurism, fiction and illusion. At the same time, it confirms that psychological determinants along the lines defined by Metz and Baudry are deeply embedded in the cinematic apparatus and its conventions even outside the dominant cinema institution.

Rather than assuming the capacity of an avant-garde cinema to produce a condition for the spectator in completely different terms, my current concerns might be described as: firstly, identifying, within cinema practice, the conditions which the apparatus and available conceptions of film structure tend to produce; secondly, attempting to dislodge them by making them problematic rather than exploit them towards the end of aesthetic expression; and thirdly, to raise the issue of the relationship of the cinematic work to reality. These concerns remain consistent with the attempt to define the content of cinema primarily from the cinematic medium and its mechanisms of mediation, and consideration of the ethical and political relation-

ship between film-maker, film and spectator.

The question then, of the choice of cinematic 'content', becomes primarily not what subjects are appropriate to the 'nature' of 'film', but, 'in what arena is it possible for film to make a transformational mediation?' This arena is not fixed, but develops in relationship to the forms of film and the institution of cinema. The issue of cinematic reality becomes neither simply the adequacy or truth of represented relations, nor the unconditional assertion of the physical presence of the cinematic experience, but the appropriation of the cinematic experience and mediating construction by spectators within their subsequent material realisation.

These concerns demand a review of many of the concepts already discussed, and analysis of their implications in the detail of cinematic operation.

AUTHORITY It is necessary to consider the spectator's place in the cinematic discourse in historical and economic terms before approaching the problem of the psychological condition of the spectator. In the dominant cinema there is an unassailable difference in role, and an extreme imbalance of economic status, between the spectator and the originating source — the corporate production machine. Even where the spectator is brought closer to the conditions and problems of production in the avant-garde film the prerogative of structuration of the work is not directly open to the spectator. It is assumed that structuration derives from an authority and this assumption is reinforced by the economics of production. Access to production tends to represent either the simple authorisation of finance or the committed energy of authorship (an investment of energy in production). In addition, the structuration brought about by the machinery and devices of cinema, even the formation of the photographic image itself, represents a deeply seated authority

of history. This historical authority sanctions the place of both spectator and film-maker in the cinematic institution and becomes embodied in conventions of film construction, the codes of lighting, acting, montage and so on. The spectator tends, unwittingly or complicitously, to take up a posture conditioned by this implicit authority. Psychological relations are both determined and reinforced within the terms of this authority relation, and spectator and film-maker are equally subject to their effects. If the film-maker cannot circumvent the role of agent of the film's structuration, it is still possible for both the status of this authority and the definition of the spectator's role in structuration to be made problematic. In the first instance, the fact of, and some of its conditions as, a production (a produced object) made evident (or not effaced) within the work initiates a speculation on its origins and causality. In this way the source and terms of its origins become relatively more locatable and its authority begins to be specifiable rather than general. Secondly, the forms of structuration themselves may be defined so as not to carry the implication of inevitability and authoritative certainty. Thirdly the film may be structured to initiate the desire in the spectator to function more thoroughly as the constituting instance of the film, to present the possibility of extending the spectator's role in structuration of the work itself. Metz is particularly misleading in his presentation of the spectator as the 'constituting instance' of film as though this condition was already an historical psychological fact. In the practice of dominant cinema, it is much more accurate to define film as *constituting* its subject spectator rather than the spectator constituting the film. All its devices and economic power are focused on determining the spectator's 'placement' and psychological relationship. Indeed, in a more radical analysis the spectating subject, rather than being seen as the ultimate agent of the film's

constitution, may be viewed as only a further agency *through* which the film does its work of maintaining social and economic divisions. In this argument, the spectator is neither the constituting instance nor constituted in any full subjectivity by the film but serves merely as a partially constituted transmitting instance.

However, authority relations remain through the division of roles in structuration, the determinations of structure itself and the historical pre-conditions of the apparatus even in the avant-garde cinema. Any problematisation must therefore involve a conflict between the work's authority and the demand that the spectator take responsibility for its realisation, that is, becomes the constituting instance. This conflict may be located in the arena of 'personality' through differences of inclination between spectator and film-maker. The simple equation of author and authority (of the location of authority in the personality of the author) whilst now evidently inadequate, is a clear advance on the unlocatable omniscience of the authority of dominant cinema as a 'stage' in the process of specifying the location and terms of a film's authority. A fundamental and more productive conflict may be located in the authority of the historical determinants acting on both film-maker and spectator. In order for a conflict to emerge in this arena, the film-maker (albeit thereby manoeuvred into the role of representative of the spectator in the historical discourse) must both recognise the condition of being subject to the historical determination and produce some form of distancing from which it may be viewed and transformed.

DURATION RECORDING The above discussion of the authority relation implicit in structuration applies equally to a form of cinema which makes no use of photography and recording. To discount the possibility of development of an abstract or concrete cinema outside the basis of

recording would equally require the dismissal of both abstract painting and music. But I have already questioned the assertion that priority for a cinema based in photorecording can be supported on an 'intrinsic filmicness'. However, it is evident that a major historical motivation for cinema is related to the desire for a method of mechanical representation, deeply embodied in the design and functioning of the apparatus — if not an 'essence' of cinema it constitutes a fundamental historical problematic. My own engagement with this problematic was never seen as a way of re-opening a dialectic with the terms of dominant cinema nor as aimed at its 'deconstruction'. I considered it almost exclusively in terms of the extension of the readable inscriptions by which the retrospective conditions of a work might be brought to bear as a component of the materially present, and it was argued in terms of the problematics of film as document (*not* documentary) and evidence. In one respect, access through the cinematic trace to the pro-filmic including shooting, developing, printing, editing and so on, has its greatest refinement and precision in the mechanism of recording image and sound. 'Duration' continues to be a particular focus of cinema 'reality' for me and at one period I sought to establish the primary reality of the duration of a film's presentation. In the search for conditions of 'traceability', when applied to the issue of 'duration', the notion of equivalence between presentation and representation time emerged as a central concept. Thus the shooting event seemed to provide the most adequate basis for the spectator to have access to retrospective duration within the trace of the conditions of production, through material duration of presentation — camera and projector, mirroring each others' functions. So the issue of film practice based in photography was reconsidered in my work not in terms of the photographic as *image* but of the record of duration, stressing the

'cinematic' aspect of 'photo-cinematic'.

Apperception of the reality of duration was seen as fundamental. If the film sought or was forced to admit any element of retrospection — any 'representation' of time not currently present except in the form of its trace — it seemed necessary to consider the durational aspect of the trace available within the terms of present duration. In my current understanding of this problem, apperception of duration cannot be completely divorced from the concept of its value (in the senses equally of value as significance, or economic and psychological investment). Investment by the spectator in experience of current duration (the currency of duration) carries over to a value for (evaluation of) the duration of the recorded events. The spectator's investment is matched and re-inforced by the investment evident in the recording act, measured in part by its duration — its temporal magnitude.

In 'Abstract Film and Beyond' and various articles, I clarified the concept of durational equivalence through comparison with the representation of time in conventional narrative film. In the representation of extensive time scales within the relatively short duration of a film's presentation, time becomes irrevocably illusionistic. Not only is the duration of the film's represented action unrelatable to the duration of its presentation, but through subversion by illusionistic continuity between shots, the shots themselves lose their durational 'documentality'. In other words, the material duration of the film's presentation, production and represented action becomes entirely dissociated; the spectator with no way of integrating the relations of present, retrospective record, and fiction, can only give in to the fictional 'duration' which subsumes all others. In this way any concept of reality in the field of durational experience is undermined by the temporal compression of narrative convention. Furthermore, the conventions of editing and montage obliterate any

trace of the temporal relations in the production, and reinforce the spectator's condition as passive consumer. Again it is possible to see some relationship between these concepts and Bazin's advocacy of long takes. For him the long take, like deep focus, permitted the reality of the pro-filmic scene and action to supersede or show through the manipulation of the film-makers' montage. Bazin compromised this challenging concept with illusionistic continuity, treating it only as a component of representational realism. I make no such assumption. Unlike the concept of a temporal 'window' the long take devices I have used have not been aimed at realism in the general sense but have been concerned with defining the limits of integratability of presence and record in the field of 'duration'. Extension of a shot's duration permits a temporal 'space' for the spectator to reflect on the conditions and relations of production as inscribed through, for example, the form of camera action, framing, surface qualities of image and printing (which has developed into a concept of perceptual dialectic to which I shall return below). The long take then has no intrinsic privilege but served (and serves) to initiate consideration of certain cinematic issues.

By arguing from the 'modernist' position that exploration of the properties and processes of film can determine its 'content', I have resisted the assumption that 'content' precedes formulation. Through considering the photo-cinematic as an aspect of film's material processes I have suggested how the pro-filmic may be integrated with this exploration. By recognising conditions of authority and historical determinants of structure at the level of the very production of the image by the apparatus, I have shown that every access to the pro-filmic is mediated and cannot be separated from the process of mediation. The conditions of this mediation are then not *intrinsically* transparent. On the contrary, this mediation is *always* selectively specific (the parameters of the

recording mechanism — range of light sensitivity, frame, focus, etc) and transformational (for example reducing spatiality to a flat surface). At the same time, however much the reality of the image is stressed over the image of reality, however much the material conditions of the production of this image is made evident, the facsimile image of photography attests to a continuum of reality extending beyond the limits of the cinematic recording. That which is specifically recorded, selected, brought within the frame and range of the parameters of recording and transformed within their processing by its specificity of 'inclusion' as fragment, asserts, through 'exclusion', the fact of a continuum (or series of intersecting continua) of which it is a fragment. It is at these 'edges' (symbolised in a sense by the frame) of 'empirical' record that the cinematic discourse, the transformation of cinema's terms of mediation through practice, intersects with other discourses. These intersections are not to be seen as self-evident capacities of cinema neither as a loose plurality of codes. The capacity of film to materially relate to other discourses (at these intersections) is highly problematic. Whilst I suggest that the problem of cinema's *possible* content is one of integratability into the area of film's *effective* mediation, it is a major illusion that cinema functions in other discourses simply through their filmic representation. In my film work and theory this has led to the possibility of a pro-filmic in which actions in time and space are recorded. Though the films stress the problematics and transformations of the mediation, traces the film as a production and derives from the problematics of the 'document' — the problems of narrative, identification and the representation of reality are unavoidably encountered.

NARRATIVE-NARRATION Though the issue of narrative is most evidently brought up where representation of human action is

incorporated within content, the problems attendant on narrative have much wider implications even within apparently abstract cinema. Crudely, a narrative is a story and a narration is the telling of a story. More complexly, a narrative is the representation of a series of events (occurrences in time) given a unity by some continuity of the passage of a character or characters through a set of relations presented as causal. In other words, a narrative represents a temporal causality in the field of human (or anthropomorphised) relations. Its unity is invariably determined by implied causality as it impinges on a central character or the episodic encounters of that character. Classical narrative carries its significance in the consequence of a trajectory which supports a moral, ideological or psychological determinism. A more complex narrative may resist *dénouement* in such terms, resist simple linearity in the causal relations and the centralisation of a character. But the identification of the spectator, listener or reader with the characters, expressed as a concern for the outcome of their actions and encounters, is fundamental to narrative. Additional dimensions to narrative may result from the 'cross-section' of description (the spatial and historical context) and the psychological investigation of character (what Maya Deren called 'vertical' as opposed to 'horizontal' developments). I am not concerned with the more general issues of narrative, but with the particular case of narrative in cinema. At issue is not the question of whether narrative can be incorporated to a materialist cinema which is false in its assumption of narrative as a single phenomenon, but how aspects of the representation of social discourse can intersect with the mediation of cinema and come within its effective arena. In the same way in which the specificity of a recording may be distinguished from a generalised representation (by stressing its specificity) the photo-cinematic record of an action (within the context of its causality) is not automatically a narrative

representation. At the same time the status of the recorded action and the identification of the spectator with the characters, and concern for the outcome of their actions become unavoidable issues.

These issues, raised problematically within my own film-work, demand some refinement in terminology particularly in the locus of identification, the investment of libido in attention and its cathexis in various objects. We have already encountered the difficulty in defining the primary object of identification within cinema: whether the identification with characters and their actions, the general 'authority' of the structuration, or the spectator's self-identification. If the narrative is broadly defined as temporal representation, then narration is the act of presenting it, of controlling the sequence of presentation. It is clear that in a quite conventional sense, much of the drama of a narrative lies not in its bare events nor even in their elaboration, but in the sequence of their unfolding. (Sophisticated narration frequently has recourse to the presentation of the narrative out of sequence: the sequence of narration is not necessarily synonymous with the sequence represented by the narrative.) The problems of cinematic structuration are almost inevitably bound up with the problems of the effect of temporal priority in presentation. If in one sense it is relatively simple to avoid narrative — temporal representation — it is more difficult to circumvent the condition of narration — temporal sequentiality.

In the existentialist novel the narrator, the source of the narration, became an element in, and often central to, the narrative. This established a predominant co-location in modern literature between fiction and autobiography. A major element of avant-garde cinema — the single person film — has echoed this shift. Even though not necessarily 'bodily' represented in the film, the film-maker became the centre of the film 'text', the film became an expression of the film-

maker's vision. The identification of the spectator then shifts away from identification with the represented characters and their action towards identification with the narrator through the autobiographical narrative. Even in the formal tendency which has tended to replace the overtly autobiographical film, the act and prerogative of structuration attests authority in authorship. The special conditions of temporal structuring — its inevitable priorities in sequence — gives to its control the quality of narration: the control of significance determined in the sequential relations is narrational and identification tends to be located, via concern for the structural 'outcome' in the originator of the narration. It may be argued that even in the overt narrative, identification with the narrator is always more primary than the identification with the characters.

IDENTIFICATION Developing from a series of films since 1974 which have progressively explored the problem of the relationships between the camera, a recorded action and the spectator's conceptual structuring, my most recent film *Emily — third party speculation* focuses on the particular problems of the movement of identification. Theoretical work which has accompanied this development (mainly contained in the article 'Problematising the Spectator Placement in Film' in *Cinema and Language*, Macmillan, forthcoming) has encountered considerable difficulty in clarifying the processes and I am even far from convinced that the terminology of identification is the most appropriate. As I understand the process of 'identification with', it involves a mechanism by which we are able to treat another person's actions and experiences as though they were our own. The necessity for such a mechanism in social relationships is fairly evident and the development of these psychological mechanisms through childhood dependencies re-inforced by adult and economic inter-dependencies can be

relatively well understood. However, in daily social intercourse, the mechanisms of identification are inseparable from their attendant psychological hostilities — the (unconscious) recognition that the actions and experiences of those others with whom we must identify are not our own. Indeed, we may realise that fulfilment of their desires is often at the expense of our capacity to fulfil our own. In the social arena, and one of the major factors by which we recognise its status as 'reality', the condition of 'identification with', is constantly mediated by the conflict with self-interest (or complex groupings of identifications and hostilities). In other words, if there is a movement of libidinal energy away from the ego 'transferred' not simply to a cathexis with another object, but to the possession of that object or achievement of a goal by another person, this is attended by resistance to that transfer. 'Vicariousness' is not synonymous with identification, but is a consequence of the suppressing of its component of psychological resistance.

In the narrative form, this conflict becomes recuperated in the conflict between characters in the fiction but this representation elides the conflict between the spectator's structuration and the authorisation of the narration. In other words, even if there is a conflict of identification within the represented action, there is no conflict in the more basic identification with the structuring authority within which the other conflicts are contained. The illusion which supports this suppression is the illusion of *implicatedness*. The primary illusion of cinema is neither the photographic illusion of a space which is not present, nor the photo-cinematic illusion of a time which is not present, but the illusion of being implicated through presence in the actions of another time and place. Attempts to define reality, in contradistinction to illusion, have invariably revolved around the question of physical presence and absence, leading to an assertion of the

presence of the signifier (or the signifying substance). The illusion of a space and time not physically present is counter-acted by an assertion of the presence of the substance of the film image. However, the distinction between reality and illusion should not originate in the question of the physical presence or absence of signifier or signified. Materialist reality is to be found in the relationship between action of the subject (subject, individual, person, ego) and implication in its consequence — the arena of irreversibility and the reality of 'realisation'.

In the narrative form of cinema, the non-implication of the spectator in the narrative action is hidden by the illusion of an apparent implicatedness. It is quite evident at one level that the spectator has no capacity to intervene in the represented actions within a film. The energy invested in attention must channel through identification with the screen's protagonists who seem to have the capacity for intervention. We are implicated vicariously, in the action of the narrative at one level through character identification, and at another level through our act of observation in the safety of voyeurism. The *real* voyeur, however, recognises certain risks of discovery, already senses social censure and is irrevocably implicated through the conflict. Though the condition of disimplication is already potentially evident in the in-consequence of voyeurism in cinema it is obscured by the ease with which our desire to remain in visible contact with the development of the action is facilitated. The predominant devices of filmic construction have been designed to match the desired extension of experience along the axis of the narrative action. As Metz says, not only do we see, but we seem to produce what we see. At the very least, even if the cinematic scene is not our own product in the sense that a dream is our product, the moment to moment shifts of scene, through camera movement and montage seem to be chosen

by us as spectators to match our desire to extend along the (pre-set) narrative line — conflicts with our desire, inability to continue the desired line, or confrontation with the fearful or repugnant are incorporated within the identifications of the narrative as the frustrations or fearful confrontations of the films' protagonists through whose mediation we experience them. Frequently, frustration of the desire to see or hear that which would seem to carry the action forward, or the confrontation with the feared object involves a correspondence between the point of view which 'represents' the film's spectator and that of the represented protagonist the so called 'point-of-view shot'. Continued correspondence of the film's development with the structure of the spectator's desire through for example following action in camera movement or cutting into the component of the scene and action most central to this desire, together with the recuperation of its frustrations into the character identification, maintains an illusion that what is seen responds to the spectator's volition (or the complex fusion of that volition with the 'fictional' volition of the protagonists with whom the identification takes place). This apparent perceptual volition and its confusion with that of the character through the 'point-of-view' or 'over-the-shoulder' shot, suppresses awareness of the fundamental dis-implication of the spectator in the film's action. (In effect, as a narrative progresses, whatever the camera placement, the shot increasingly comes to represent what is available to the sight of the character with whom we identify.) Not only is the spectator given an illusion of implicatedness in the represented action through character identification, this is extended to the much more fundamental illusion of implicated volition through seeming to 'produce' the visual and aural access to the unfolding of this action. Again what is primarily masked by this illusion is the authority relation between the spectator and the film

construct — the spectator seems to 'constitute' the film perception whilst it is the film which produces the spectator as its subject.

IDENTIFICATION WITH HISTORICAL AUTHORISATION I have already indicated briefly how in the history of the avant-garde film through the existentialist, one person film, the film-maker becomes the main protagonist of the film's action — in a sense the film becomes composed entirely in the convention of the 'point-of-view' shot. Narrator and the film's protagonist become located together. However, even if the locus of identification is shifted, the psychological conditions of its mechanism are not necessarily transformed. Extreme reductions within the film's action, for example, to sequences of empty black and white frames, do not automatically dislodge these mechanisms. Attempts, using randomisation, mathematical system and computer editing, for example, to eliminate the hierarchy of temporal priority and depersonalise the narrator by mechanising the 'narration' (structuration) mask the relocation of the author's subjectivity in the initiation and application of the system. In addition they tend further to embed identification into the falsely 'objective' historical authorisation of technology. The problem of identification, like the authority relations with which it is intricately, cannot be simply circumvented.

Again, the need to make the mechanisms problematic within the film work becomes evident. Evidently, the arena of 'psychological mechanisms' (and their social determinants) may only be made problematic in cinema through the cinematic discourse. This arena may only be approached in the same way in which I have previously discussed the integration of pro-filmic 'reality'. Intersecting discourses may only be effectively (materialistically) integrated at the critical point of their intersection in the conceptual space between the evidently

visible record and its structurally causal relations, their integration as 'non-visible' in the field of the visible must remain problematic.

In my own work, the recognition of a distinction between an expressive and a problematic aesthetic emerged simultaneously with the reconsideration of the problem of access to the pro-filmic through the camera. This formed the background from which the films since 1973 have developed. *White Field Duration* (1973), problematises the basic capacity of a cinematic record to transpose past reality to the present, *After Manet* (1974) the conceptual relationship of the camera to the scene in spatial terms, *Blackbird Descending — tense alignment* (1976), in temporal terms and *Emily — third party speculation* (1979) in terms of the movement of identification.

IDENTIFICATION WITH THE CAMERA In discussing identification with the camera we must be aware that its arguments derive largely from consideration of the camera in terms of a still-photographic apparatus. We must bear a number of thoughts in mind in the application to cinema. For example, the concept of a 'point of access' to a scene must be extended into the terms of a 'thread of access' to a temporality. Even where a camera is static within a film sequence it already has a dynamic movement along the time axis, in both its duration of recording and presentation. Consequently, the concept of spatial perspective might be extended to include temporal perspective.

Metz, following Baudry, attempts to equate an ideal 'transcendental' self-identification of the spectator, with the 'ideal' vanishing point in quattrocento perspective and embodied technologically in the structure of the camera and lens. He argues this vanishing point as an 'empty implacement' centering the spectator's identification. I have a number of disagreements and difficulties with the concepts. Most fundamentally, any form of identification, however accurate its

psychological description, which is 'placed' in an ideal, transcendental location, must, by definition, involve a non-recognition of that location as historically determined. Metz is aware of this in his psychological description but gives no indication of the possibility of its being made problematic or dislodged either in the psyche or cinematic practice. Even the basic argument that the vanishing point of perspective is intrinsically ideal can be challenged on the basis that its production by a definable method or mechanism produces on the contrary an ultra-specific relationship between the image, its method of production and the spectator. Historically, perspective was a development in the general concept of individuality contributing particularly to the distinction between the spectator and the representation. The spectator is not *less* placed in a 'scene' when the terms of that placement are undefined or undefinable, an issue which becomes particularly important in considering the *temporal* structuration in cinema. Perspective, far from intrinsically demanding an unconscious identification of the spectator with that point of access initiates the possibility of a discrimination between the place of the spectator and the point-of-view determined by the system to the scene. Any identification then which comes about with the 'empty implacement' is an unconscious identification with the historical authority of that system presented not as *a* mechanism of structure but as *the* true, natural (historically sanctioned) mechanism of representation.

The structure and implications of the form of identification with the camera which takes place in a film depends significantly on the context. In those rare instances of cinema where a film is structured towards an awareness of the camera — its properties as a mechanism — by indicating the limits of access to the scene, any unspecified omniscience is counteracted. In this way the viewpoint becomes relatable to a causal agency,

readable in a materialist sense as an element in production and history, rather than as a generalised, inevitable, natural access. Awareness of the camera, its presence and effects within the image, must be intentionally produced.

Conversely, in dominant cinema, considerable resources go into the effacement of its inscription which suggests that it is far from intrinsically transparent.

One of the cornerstones of the illusionistic codes of cinema involves the attempted denial of the presence of the material recording apparatus, in turn supporting the transcendental omniscience of the point of access to the image. As the camera is not represented visibly in the scene, its inscription exists via the effects which it has on the photographed material. Consequently if the spectator is to become aware of the effects and constraints of the camera, this must be produced conceptually from the non-representational inscriptions. In this case, the spectator moves towards a conceptual identification 'of' the camera, and does not simply identify 'through' its emplacement with the components of the representation.

An impetus towards such conceptualisation may derive from devices which stress the special conditions and limits of the cinematic image, differentiating them from the conditions of perception which might pertain for the spectator if the scene were encountered outside a cinematic mediation. In this way, the 'imaginary' of the camera relation is not simply contained within the imaginary space (and diegesis) produced for the spectator by the 'placement' in the scene (and action), but becomes an imaginary conceptual construct made possible through the specification or identification of differences.

This process is, in fact, extremely complex, as certain components of the image must be identified (with?) and some spatio/temporal relations established before the unrepresented, though inscribed, relations of the camera can be

conceptually produced. In addition to which, identification of the camera is not a single, but multiple identification — it cannot be simply determined in the fact of its presence, nor any one of its specific limitations, like framing, focus, focal-length, spatio/temporal relation to the recorded scene. Its identification is also implicitly related to the identification of the agency of its manipulation and the historical conventions of that manipulation currently in play.

Devices which 'denaturalise' the camera emplacement, counteract its unconscious reading as representing a (disembodied) human eye and draw attention to the fact and conditions of its mediation initiate a speculation in the 'space' between what is recorded (seen and heard) and what is not directly evidenced. Certain interruptions in the flow of desire in identification into the scene and into its continuing action by specifying and making evident the conditions of spatial access (or other mediations of the camera) make it possible to differentiate the point-of-view from the action and thus the camera emplacement from the position of the spectator. Speculation in the arena of what can be known, through the recorded inscription (image and sound) what can be deduced or guessed at, begins to problematise various other intersections at the fringe of inscription in the image. The differentiation of the spectator from the scene initiates speculation within the arena of the 'symbolic' production of the spectator. Delineating the intersection of discourses occurs simultaneously with the speculative symbolic production by the spectator and becomes the basis of a relationship of *appropriation* in contrast to passive consumption. As the spectator has no capacity to intervene in the arena of a film's fictive action, nor even in its documental action, nor even further in its material structuration, the region of appropriation must be defined within the conceptual and symbolic operation of the spectator. Consequently, any illusions of

implicatedness, and presence which tend to derive from the various levels of identification need to be counteracted. At the same time the lure which maintains attention, a basic apprehension, the various structures of libidinal movement and the 'economics' of this 'investment' must be taken into account.

REFLEXIVENESS AND THE EGO Some criticism of the concept of the 'speculative/reflexive' spectator, has emerged along the lines that this reinforces the coherence of the spectator's ego — which is an illusory unity. However, this must be seen in the context of the alternatives of practice. If the spectator subject is to encounter the inadequacies of unification and stability of the ego, in a way which may be psychologically integratable, as in psycho-analysis, this must be produced (paradoxically) in the arena of a self-identification in its encounter with implicated consequentiality. In film, on the one hand, structural incoherence does not confront the spectator with fundamental difficulties of ego coherence. On the other hand, the conventional practices of cinema which do not differentiate the spectator ego from the film, produce an unconscious and restricted coherence along the axis of the narrative identification. In this practice, it is the continuous dissociation of spatial and temporal access through camera movement and editing, which, by disrupting any possible self-produced coherence of 'viewpoint' by the spectator, makes the spectator unavoidably subject to the narrative and narrational coherence of the film.

SPECTATOR ECONOMY — PRODUCTION ECONOMY In order to understand the mechanisms of this disruption, it is necessary to consider the relationship between the economics of producing a cinematic sequence and the psychological (motivational) economics of perception. In daily life, perceptual changes for the subject are deeply intricated with the expenditure in energy needed to bring

them about. This expenditure operates at all levels from the muscular adjustments in the eye to larger expenditure of motivational energy in bodily movement — 'acts' initiate consequences.

In addition, the energies invested in the complexities of motivation are derived from the deep psychological history of a subject's implicated and consequential encounters. In film, economic investment is made in producing a 'view-point' and continuity of spatio/temporal experience, outside of the constraints acting on lived experience. A fundamental example which forms a major foundation of cinematic practice, is in the editing montage of two distinct spatial view-points as if continuous in time. The economics of this production (implementing the relocation of camera, lighting and re-enactments of performers between takes, then editing and all the complex pre-planning of one in terms of the demands of the other) are incompatible with the economics of perception of the spectator when confronted with the result. Instantaneous shifts in spatial view-point and time would be impossible for the spectator outside of the conditions of film and any equivalent shift would involve an expenditure of energy and occupy time. The interim time is suppressed both in the conditions of production (the time of relocation, etc) and in perception. At issue here is not the capacity of film to produce experience outside and beyond the economics of daily perception, but that by *exploiting* such a capacity the dialectics and conflicts of its (economic) difference is made impossible. The possible dialectical conflict which is implicit in the spatial dislocation of shot construction in action montage (and similarly spatial and temporal dislocations in the larger scale 'movements' of a film's action) is suppressed by the maintenance of the narrational continuity. Through the suppression of this dialectic, the spectator's ego has no alternative other than to abandon the attempt to produce a spatio/temporal (psychological) economic

coherence outside the film's diegesis and instead to be produced by the continuities determined in the economics of the production.

The special and limited ego coherence then, which is produced in and by the narrational coherence of the film, is not compatible with the attempt to promote some (coherent) differentiation of the spectator ego within the dialectics of a perceptual 'economy'. It is consequently evident that a project which seeks to define the arena in which the spectator may appropriate the film 'experience' (which I might provisionally designate the speculative/reflexive conceptually symbolic operation) must extend the dialectical encounter with view-point as discussed in the terms of camera identification to the various economics (financial and psychological) of the splice.

SPLICE AS TIME FRAME Though elided by continuity, and even by the temporal proximity of instantaneous juxtaposition, the splice always inscribes a fissure of discontinuity. It functions as a frame to duration in a similar way in which the picture edge functions as a frame to space. Each case constitutes a fringe and intersection with a continuum to which, as an evident fragment (incompleteness), it attests. As in the case of the picture frame, it is at the end of specific inscription of temporality, determined by the initiation and cessation of a shot, that conceptual speculation may determine the intersection and integration of discourses outside the directly inscribable range of the specifically cinematic temporality.

CONCLUSION So, I might conclude, inadequately as in all conclusions: film's content is not tautologically confined by its material manipulations, nor by the documental empiricism of its recorded inscriptions but its extension remains critical and problematic at the edge of its material inscriptions.

This edge, which may be defined in some instances literally by the frame or the splice for example, or which may be represented in their function as metaphor for all the limits of 'inclusion/exclusion' which the cinematic mediation currently encounters or might encounter, is the edge at which the invisible becomes visible, the inaudible, audible and in general all those non-visible, non-audible relations impinge in the causality of the visible and audible inscription. Exploration of this critical edge (critical edges) within the aspiration of a materialist practice is bound up with the definition of the terms in which the spectator may establish an implicated, consequential relationship with the exploration — an issue with repercussions both in the structure of films and the institution within which they are produced and presented.

Malcolm Le Grice Filmography

1965	<i>China Tea</i> 10 min
1966	<i>Castle One</i> 20 min
1967	<i>Little Dog For Roger</i> 12 min (2 screen)
1967	<i>Yes, No, Maybe, Maybe Not</i> 8 min (2 screen)
1967-68	<i>Talla</i> 20 min
1967-68	<i>Blind White Duration</i> 12 min
1968	<i>Castle 2</i> 35 min
1968	<i>Grass</i>
1968	<i>Wharf</i>
1969	<i>Spot The Microdot</i> 10 min
1970	<i>Your Lips No 1</i> 5 min (Computer-film)
1970	<i>Lucky Pigs</i> (3 screen) 4 min
1970	<i>Region Of The Vampire</i> 14 min (3 screen projection)
1970	<i>Berlin Horse</i> 8 min
1971	<i>Love Story 1</i> (shadow performance)
1971	<i>Horror Film 1</i> (performance)
1971	<i>Love Story 2</i> 12 min
1971	<i>1919</i> 10 min (3 screen)
1971	<i>Your Lips</i> 2 5 min
1972	<i>Love Story 3</i> 10 min (2 screen)
1972	<i>Horror Film 2</i> 30 min (3D-shadow performance)
1972	<i>Newport</i> 14 min
1972	<i>Whitchurch Down</i> 10 min (3 screen projection)
1972	<i>Threshold</i> 10 min

- | | | | |
|-------|---|---------|---|
| 1972. | <i>Blue Field Duration</i> 18 min | 1974 | <i>After Lumière—L'Arroseur</i> |
| 1972 | <i>Pre-production</i> (performance) | | <i>Arrosé</i> 16 min |
| 1973 | <i>White Field Duration</i> 20 min | 1975 | <i>After Manet, After Giorgione —</i> |
| | (2 screen) | | <i>Le Dejeuner sur l'Herbe or Fête</i> |
| 1973 | <i>Matrix and Joseph's Coat</i> 12 min | | <i>Champêtre</i> 60 min (4 screen) |
| | (4-6 screen) | 1976/77 | <i>Art Works 1: Academic Still Life</i> |
| 1973 | <i>Four-Wall Duration</i> (4 screen | | <i>(Cézanne)</i> 20 min |
| | installation) | 1976/77 | <i>Art Works 2: Time and Motion</i> |
| 1973 | <i>Gross Fog</i> (3+ screen installation) | | <i>Study</i> 20 min |
| 1973 | <i>After Leonardo</i> 25 min (6 screen | 1977 | <i>Blackbird Descending (Tense</i> |
| | performance) | | <i>Alignment)</i> 150 min |
| 1973 | <i>Don't Say</i> 12 min | 1979 | <i>Emily—Third Party Speculation</i> |
| 1973 | <i>Principles Of Cinematography.</i> | | 60 min |
| | <i>After Leslie J Wheeler</i> 20 min | | |
| | (performance) | | |
| 1974 | <i>Screen-Entrance-Exit</i> (3 screen | | |
| | performance) | | |

(Most of the above films are available from the London Film-makers' Co-op, 42 Gloucester Avenue, London NW1)

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PAM COOK

STAR SIGNS

Richard Dyer's ambitious book *Stars* (British Film Institute, 1979*) was originally conceived as a study text for teachers. Part of its aim was to survey the vast amount of material on the Hollywood star system, but behind the academic project lie polemical assertions deriving from the author's position on sexual politics and film theory. As a feminist involved in these areas I want to point to some of the problems and contradictions that this book raises. They are primarily problems of method rather than content, and I am not concerned to assess its value as an account of the star system. The questions I raise may be partial and incomplete, but at the same time they are part of a discussion which will continue.

PERSONAL VIEWS The tradition of 'personal', opinion in British film

1 R Wood and L Russell (pseud P Wollen), 'Jean Luc Godard' *New Left Review* no 39 1966, pp77-87.

A Lovell, 'Robin Wood — a dissenting view, *Screen March*/April 1969, vol 10 no 2 p42.

R Wood, 'Ghostly Paradigm and HCF: an answer to Alan Lovell' *Screen March*/April 1969, vol 10 no 3, p35.

A Lovell, 'The Common Pursuit of True Judgement' *Screen* vol 11 nos 4/5, 1970, p76.

criticism has been the subject of much debate. Marxist-structuralist critics have argued against this tradition that criteria of personal taste are of less value in analysing film than a theoretical approach which takes into account production of meaning generated by the structure of film itself and the space it inhabits as a social product.¹ The criticism of analysis based on personal opinion and empirical observation has marked a theoretical shift which has brought with it new definitions of authorship: the author (or critic) of a film can no longer be seen in a position of transcendence, existing simply 'outside' the work, but is to be found inscribed in its pattern of oppositions, as part of its material structure. The author, or spectator, as one element in the overall production of meaning is therefore neither totally in control nor totally controlled. At the same time psychoanalysis has been seen as providing a means of articulating theoretically the place of the individual as a subject 'in' language and ideology, constructed in a shifting and contradictory process in which the activity of producing meaning depends upon inter-subjective relationships, and cannot therefore be reduced to a single originating source. One of the most important elements of this theoretical 'break', apart from its insistence on the importance of the unconscious, has been the idea that the subject itself is divided, dispersed across

* Available from SEFT, price £2.25 plus 50p, p & p

language: the 'I' can no longer be thought of as unified although we may experience it as such because of the way bourgeois ideology works to reproduce the notion of a coherent subject at the centre of the world.

The concept of the non-unified subject introduces a contradiction into sexual politics. Gays, feminists and the libertarian left have continually argued for the breaking down of divisions between private (personal) and public (political) and have been concerned to bring the 'personal' and the 'private' into history. Notions of caring, creativity and expressivity, since they have been excluded from the public sphere (except in ritualised form in the arts) and relegated to the private world of the family and personal relationships, can thus become important to any political strategy which challenges the divisions of patriarchal society. Yet the slogan 'the personal is political' has sometimes been adopted in an unproblematic way, as though the division can be overcome at will, and as though notions such as creativity and self-expression are without problems themselves. While it is strategically important to bring together the 'personal' and the 'political' in such a polemical slogan, the value of the polemic lies not simply in the act of bringing together the two terms, but in the way that this is done. In so far as one term of the division, the 'personal', is sometimes used to support the notion of the possibility of a unified transcendent subject existing outside of struggle, crisis and the process of history, it effaces splits within subjects by creating an imaginary subject conceived as 'free' and consistent, in control of the world. The question raised for political strategy, therefore, is whether it is to be founded on this notion of unified subjects, or whether the knowledge which theoretical work has produced of contradictions at work in the construction of the subject can be developed to formulate a different politics founded on a different concept of

subjectivity, and hence a different articulation of the relation between the 'political' and the 'personal'.

This is a dilemma which clearly confronts Richard Dyer. From his position in the gay movement, he recognises the value of personal discourse: his style of writing and methodology are based upon it. Thus, discussing Klapp's 'categories of seduction and transcendence':

How, for instance, can one actually distinguish with any rigour between the two? Can one not see both, and especially transcendence, as simply providing a 'safety-valve' for discontent, and by providing expression of it siphoning it off as a substantial subversive force? The answer to that depends on how hermetic your conception of the mass-media, and of ideology, is. My own belief is that the system is a good deal more 'leaky' than many people would currently maintain.' (p28)

This is a form of language which attempts to open up discussion in the first instance. Then, by reducing theoretical arguments to questions of individual opinion which exist side by side in a non-problematic relationship to each other, it effectively avoids discussion. This is a consistent strategy throughout the book. Political and theoretical positions are posited simply as matters of personal belief and therefore become beyond debate.

The attempt to bring forward the discursive 'I' into academic language is important in that it disturbs the academic illusion of rational objectivity and its concomitant effacement of the productive work of the subject. But how might it be possible to draw on the radical insights of linguistics, semiology and psychoanalysis (as Richard Dyer does extensively) and then introduce personal discourse in a way which does not support the ideology we wish to challenge?

STARS AND STEREOTYPES Richard Dyer takes issue with the notion that stars can be seen as real people: they are only accessible to us as signs through texts. This formulation not only ignores the extent to which some stars have interfered or participated in the process of production in general to influence the final product; by concentrating on the star as an objective phenomenon outside the process of production of meaning he avoids dealing with the element of fantasy involved in the way that stars are used to fascinate and captivate the spectator. His argument about the subversive effect of 'mis-casting' Marilyn Monroe as Lorelei in Hawks' film version of Anita Loos' play *'Gentlemen Prefer Blondes'* is a case in point:

Monroe's construction of Lorelei as innocently, utterly but not manipulatively, sexual, a construction stemming from the basic pattern of Monroe's image and at variance with Loos' Lorelei, confuses Hawks' division of the female world into manipulative feminine women and likeable masculine (or non-feminine) ones. (p 178)

This interpretation conflicts with my own, because it is precisely Monroe's manipulative sexuality, which is not entirely incompatible with 'innocence', that I find pleasurable in the film. Indeed, Monroe's image is substantially based on the dumb-blonde stereotype which itself rests on this combination of 'innocence' and 'manipulation' as part of a nexus of contradictory oppositions. It is therefore difficult to accept an argument about subversion which is only based on an individual interpretation of the star's discrete image, at the expense of all the other factors which might contribute to the construction of meaning. A simple commutation might have tested the argument better.² What would be the result of substituting Jayne Mansfield, say, instead of Monroe? The effect of the shift

in meaning produced by this substitution might serve to indicate that Monroe's value as a sign of 'natural sexuality' is precisely what is required (as part of a set of opposition, one of which might be 'Marilyn Monroe vs Jane Russell') by the ideological construction of female sexualit



Publicity stills of Marilyn Monroe, *above*, and Jayne Mansfield, *below*, from the National Film Archive collection.



2 J O Thompson, 'Screen Acting and the Commutation Test', *Screen* vol 19 no 2

in the film as a 'trouble' in the male order.

Stars are idealised figures created by a system of representation to ensure that the audience continues to return to the cinema to enjoy the mechanism of disavowal ('I know, but . . .'). This mechanism, which is not restricted to stars, is basic to the pleasure afforded by classic narrative cinema. The process of idealisation of stars is supported by the surrounding discourses of fan magazines, advertising, newspapers and so on, each of which in specific ways function to establish stars as both similar to ordinary people and different from them, special. In this way the dual relationship of identification (participation) and distance (separation) which the spectator enjoys in this cinema is reinforced. Stereotypes function in language as part of a process of repetition by which ideological meaning accumulates and solidifies so that we experience it as 'natural', unchanging and essential. They are not realistic in themselves, but through constant repetition they come to be seen as embodiments of 'truth', and the relationship of sign to meaning is seen as self-evident. Ideology uses stereotypes to fix the process of production of meaning, and to reduce its plurality to a limited number of signifieds. But the attempt to fix meaning through stereotypes goes against the grain of production of meaning in language. Part of the pleasure in stereotypes lies in this accretion of meaning around the sign which invites the reader/spectator into a search for the 'truth' which is known to be hidden beneath the solidified surface, a momentary interruption in the narrative drive towards resolution.

Both stars and stereotypes are an effect of this process of naturalisation of the relationship between sign and meaning by which ideology represents itself as universal. Stars are 'named figures' embodying a coherence built up from a limited combination of signifieds over a range of discourses. Like stereotypes, they

rest on the contradiction between the plurality of meanings in language, and the limits imposed on that plurality, which ideology represents as fixed and inevitable. One way to denaturalise or deconstruct stars and stereotypes is by shifting this 'natural' relationship between sign and meaning, as in the Mansfield/Monroe commutation test above, or as in the role-reversal games in *Tout Va Bien* where Yves Montand and Jane Fonda take the place of the factory workers.

Although Richard Dyer defines stars as 'complex sign clusters' and supports his notion of 'charisma' (borrowed from Max Weber) by the assertion that stars are bundles of contradictions, he does not base these definitions on any theory of language. In general he accepts a sociological model in which stars as signs 'mediate' ideology. Whilst ideology is defined as contradictory, there is no discussion of the ways in which signs and ideology relate to each other. Signification is regarded as unproblematic.

Stars, of course, represent and are represented by 'real' human individuals who can fall ill, become pregnant, age, die and are difficult to replace. They are unpredictable: their physical image is necessary to the continuity of the system of representation. At the same time that image is subject to the demands of history and fashion, and the different meanings produced by each film. Ideology attempts to resolve the constant threat of slippage and excess by fixing meaning as natural and recognisable. With the help of stereotypes and narrative resolution ideology works to stabilise the potential trouble to the system that stars represent. The 'fit' between star and stereotype is always problematic, since it is based on this contradiction between containment and excess in signification.

Of course it is possible to exploit the contradictions upon which language rests against its systematisation, to push against the limits, to foreground them, to produce other contradictions. There is a history of feminist film criticism in this country which draws on the insights of

structuralism, semiology and psychoanalysis, and which works within this theory of language as system, structure and production in order to suggest ways in which the system might be disturbed to construct new alternative or oppositional meanings. This criticism depends on a theoretical knowledge of the structure of the system and the ways in which patriarchal ideology places the figure of the woman within it, and the spectator in relation to that figure. Whatever the problems inherent in these approaches, they specifically depend upon a concept of subversion which works within and against the system itself to disrupt it. In this argument there is nothing 'essential' in the figure of Dietrich, say, which can be described as subversive: the extent of subversion depends upon the manipulation and reorganisation of the codes of the system. That reorganisation can be as much the work of the star as of any other element in the system, and stars have been known to influence and control films at certain points in their careers. This does not mean, however, that stars carry transcendental meaning which exists outside of the film (or other) texts in which they appear. The 'known persona' of a star is constantly shifting as it traverses different films: 'characteristic' features of performance are subject to the changing demands of history, ideology and cinematic language. Stars, like all signifiers are transformed in the activity of signification. It is this concept of transformation that makes it possible to think about subverting the system as opposed to accepting it on its own terms as 'eternal'. Work on 'foregrounding' stereotypes depends on a process of deconstruction and reconstruction of dominant language to produce new ideological meanings, displacing and disrupting the 'natural' coherence of the stereotype. Without this emphasis on structure and on the processes of signification, the argument about subverting the dominant codes can become

formalist or essentialist, lacking the perspective of necessary transformation. In fact, this is what happens to Molly Haskell's argument about Dietrich (p 179) who is conceived as resisting the stereotype by the power of her personal charisma, thus apparently escaping the symbolic structure of 'patriarchal' language. Richard Dyer follows and develops Haskell's formulation. This allows him to adopt a sociological model of subversion rather than a semiological one. The latter would include 'charisma' as part of the process of idealisation and disavowal inherent in dominant narrative cinema, and subversion would imply the denaturalisation and disruption of that process rather than its celebration.

To adopt the notion of 'charisma' as an essential feature of the star is to allow for a simple view of identification which removes the problem from the specific context of the structures of bourgeois language. If the classic narrative film binds the spectator in a relationship of identification and separation it does so through specific cinematic strategies which are part of the process of signification within the cinematic system. I would argue that rather than accepting its terms we need to understand that system and our place within it in order to confront it. The argument for the creation of figures for positive identification in film is therefore problematic in that it rests on the same acceptance of the process of disavowal, the same suspension of 'knowledge'. How can we begin to work on the system of identification itself to problematise it rather than continue to be caught in disavowal? How can we open up productive questions which contribute to a process of political transformation?

If desire arises from the play of differences in language construction, then opening up the space of difference would raise desire as a question. It would not close down on it as Richard Dyer suggests in his discussion of identification (*Stars*, p 184). The imaginary may have a value

in testing the limits of the economy of the system of representation, but left to itself it may just mirror the collapse of knowledge into the belief on which that economy is based:

When I see Marilyn Monroe I catch my breath; when I see Montgomery Clift I sigh over how beautiful he is; when I see Barbara Stanwyck, I know that women are strong . . . (pp184-185)

There is a great deal at stake for women in this formulation, which echoes a history of oppression as idealised object of patriarchal representation. I recognise the pleasure that Richard Dyer is describing; it is certainly true that stars and stereotypes offer moments of delight to both homosexuals and heterosexuals because of the potential 'trouble' to the system of representation that they promise, but as a woman I have, perhaps, more investment in analysing such responses and the fantasies upon which they are based than in holding onto them. One step in that direction might be the recognition that these moments of delight and wonder are subject to the forward drive of the narrative towards resolution: the expectation of closure is a precondition of the pleasure involved. The 'classic realist text' addresses itself to us as subjects in such a way that we recognise in its provisional openness the closure upon which our own pleasure depends.

SEXUALITY In patriarchal society sexuality is ordered around the necessity of the reproduction of human life. The original bi-sexuality of the drives is transformed by the Oedipus complex into the heterosexual structure, through identification (albeit ambivalent) with a parent figure of the same sex and the choice of love object from the opposite sex. In the course of this transition the child becomes aware of his or her separation from the mother's body and of the irreducible fact of sexual difference.

Lacanian psychoanalysis has emphasised that this structure is founded on a symbolic system from which we constantly seek to, but cannot, escape. The sexually heterogeneous human individual becomes a sexed subject by occupying a position in relation to certain fixed divisions reinforced by the castration complex: male (active, bearer of the phallus) vs female (passive, lacking the phallus). As sexed subjects we are constructed by these divisions, but we always exceed them. In patriarchal society there are a number of structural divisions: heterosexual/homosexual, male/female, in which the former is privileged over the latter, reflecting a sexual imbalance in favour of heterosexual male control. These divisions cross over each other producing different sets of positions which overlap and contradict. Thus homosexual men and women adopt positions in resistance to patriarchal definitions of sexuality as based on reproduction, but heterosexual men and women can also adopt these positions of resistance from a different standpoint. Similarly, lesbians and heterosexual women can adopt positions of resistance to male control of reproduction, for instance, again from different standpoints.

Sexual politics, both gay and feminist, has done much to push against the limits of fixed divisions, questioning the assignment of 'roles' to men and women. Feminists have argued that the sexual division of labour by which women remain in the home and men control productive labour must be broken down, and that the value placed on these different kinds of work must be re-assessed. Gays have argued that the sexual division: male/female must itself be broken down to allow for wider possibilities of object choice. Paradoxically, it is politically important for these groups to adopt the terms of the divisions in order to argue for their transformation. Thus, feminists argue that it is as women that their right to control their own reproductive capacities acts in opposition to male dominance, and gays

argue that it is as homosexuals that they are in opposition to the heterosexual structure. This argument can lead to the privileging of one point-of-view (or subject position) over another: some feminists privilege women's point-of-view over men's, and some gays privilege the homosexual point-of-view over the heterosexual. But a political strategy which bases itself on the very divisions it seeks to challenge creates problems for itself. It creates the need for a politics which can proceed on the basis of a recognition that positions based on division are adopted, but whose aim is to question the limits of those divisions and the existing relations of dominance and subordination. To achieve this, heterogeneity and difference must be brought into play.

In terms of cinema, should we then look for positive representations of women or homosexuals in films, or should we begin to find ways to question the system of representation based on sexual imbalance? Richard Dyer seems at one point to argue for positive representations as a political priority:

To these objections to blanket anti-representation/identification positions, I would add a more immediate political one, and this is that for groups — the working class, women, blacks, gays — who have been excluded from the culture's system of representation in all but marginal or demeaning forms, the call for an end to identification figures is, if nothing else, premature. (p 184)

Leaving aside the problematic use of an untheorised notion of identification, something of this argument seems to lie beneath his analysis of Jane Fonda's 'image career'.

Throughout the 'kinky' French films, her 'healthy', 'American' qualities were applauded, and Fonda has remained unerringly 'normal' ie heterosexual . . . I do not wish to propose that Fonda's

image is an anti-gay one, but it is certainly an ostensibly non-gay one, and this, together with her parentage and acting skill makes her politics, especially her feminism, seem more ordinary and normal. (p 94)

The confusion here (non-gay = heterosexual = normal) is all the more worrying in that Dyer criticises Molly Haskell for being 'heterosexually normative' or 'heterosexist', yet seems to accept her own formulations himself. He is then led into a straight opposition between homosexual and heterosexual which in his terms seems to privilege the former as a discrete category over the latter.

The dominant heterosexual structure, in so far as it asserts itself as universal, must be de-naturalised and questioned, yet homosexuality cannot escape the structures of patriarchal society. Homosexuality is therefore also open to question if we are really to understand those structures as based on contradiction. It cannot be seen as a simple alternative to heterosexuality; the 'trouble' that homosexuality represents for patriarchy is a vital area of investigation, but we should not forget the basic heterogeneity of the subject, the play of difference and multiplicity of positions which crosses sexual divisions.

SOCIOLOGY AND SEMIOLOGY In his introduction Richard Dyer argues for the necessary relationship between sociology and semiology in approaching the star system:

Semiotic analysis has to make assumptions about how texts work before proceeding to analyse them: once it is granted that all texts are social facts, then it follows that these textual assumptions must be grounded in sociological ones. You need to know what kind of thing a text is in society in order to know what kind of questions you can legitimately pose of it, what kind of knowledge you can reasonably

expect it to yield. (pp 1-2)

The problem here is the collapsing together of two disciplines with different and incompatible projects. The bringing together of incompatible theories is not in itself unproductive, if they are brought together in such a way as to produce new knowledge. Richard Dyer elides the two approaches without pointing to crucial differences between them.

The sociological approach to signification, on which Dyer draws in the first section of the book, ignores the specific material structure of language by placing its emphasis on a 'social reality' or ideology. Stars either reflect or mediate this in an unproblematic way (viz Douglas Fairbanks and Marilyn Monroe p 36). The sociological 'reflective' approach allows Richard Dyer to support his notion of 'charisma': stars as complex clusters of contradictions with which we identify at certain historical moments. But the idea of 'complex clusters of contradictions' co-exists with a notion that the relationship of stars to society, and audience identification with stars, is 'transparent', ie society and audience are seen as existing somehow outside of language. In the sociological argument the 'complex clusters of contradictions' relate in a direct and transparent fashion to the complex ideological contradictions prevalent in society at a given historical moment: they express the complex world-view of a social group, which is given.

Semiology, on the other hand, has completely rethought this approach to signification, involving a radically different conception of history and the role of language and ideology within it. In this conception history is seen as

a complex process of contradictions within and between economic, political and ideological practices, a process whose development is uneven. Within this, the particular practice of ideology at any one time is determined by the overall relations between practices within the social

formation. Art is a practice of language within ideology: as such its task is to contribute to the building of a particular reality. It uses language in particular ways to carry this out. (R Coward and J Ellis Language and Materialism, London 1977 p 35)

In this formulation 'reality', the social formation, is not an absolute 'given', it is *produced* in a complex formation of different kinds of representations which govern the concrete, lived relations of men and women to their world. The emphasis here is on process and production, on *how* social relations and subjectivity are produced rather than what is produced. This opens the way to the necessity of changing modes of representation as a part of the process of transforming social relations.

Richard Dyer's use of the sociological approach and his formulations of the notions of 'charisma' and 'identification', run the risk of suggesting that there is no need to change the dominant forms, that *in themselves* they provide the possibility of the expression of alternative or oppositional ideologies. A properly theorised semiological approach would not support this argument, since it would conceive of social relations, and the place of the subject within those relations, as produced in and formed by language and modes of representation. The transformation of one set of relationships is necessary to all the others. Hence the importance both of modernist textual practice and theory (eg Brecht) concerned with transforming the relationship of the subject to language and ideology.

This concept of transformation is the basis of my argument with Richard Dyer. It depends upon a theoretical approach which seeks to understand the system of representation upon which patriarchal society rests in order that it may find points of contradiction which might be exploited to change that system. I would argue

further that a materialist theory of social transformation cannot afford to take itself for granted as existing outside of criticism and change. The impact of linguistics, semiology and psychoanalysis on British film theory has had diverse effects. The most problematic of these has been the convergence of these disciplines with marxist and sexual politics. Materialist theory needs to recognise and understand these diverse effects. By opening up questions which it may be accustomed to dismissing by virtue of its assumed possession of a 'correct line' it enters into the process of historical

transformation. It can then proceed on the basis of the recognition of difference and confrontation, by a strategy of negation which holds all the terms of the argument in play.

I have taken issue with some of the arguments in Richard Dyer's book in order to participate in this process of transformation. The theoretical and political implications of those arguments extend beyond the scope of a study of the Hollywood star system: it is to be hoped that they can be brought forward into productive contact with other, different arguments.

A F T E R I M A G E

No 5 Spring 1975/Aesthetics/Ideology/Cinema

Burch and Dana: 'Propositions'. Jean-Louis Baudry: 'Writing, Fiction, Ideology'. Pierre Francastel: 'Seeing . . . Decoding'. Emilio Garroni: 'Heterogeneity of the Aesthetic Object . . .'

No 6 Summer 1976/English Independent Cinema

Dusinberre: 'St George in the Forest: The English Avant-Garde'. Rayns: 'Born to Kill: Mr Soft Eliminator'. Mulvey/Wollen: 'Written Discussion'. Willemen: 'Voyeurism, the Look and Dwoskin'. Burch: 'Avant-Garde or Vanguard?'. Glyn/Marris: 'Seven Years of Cinema Action'. Cottringer: 'Peter Gidal's Theory . . .'. Dunford: 'Experimental/

Avant-Garde/Revolutionary/Film Practice'

No 7 Summer 1978/Seeing: Hearing
Edward Bennett — The Films of Straub are not 'theoretical'. Martin Walsh — Straub/Huillet's History Lessons: The Frontiers of Language. Ruby Rich — Kristina . . . For An Introduction. Yvonne Rainer—Kristina Talking Pictures. Regina Cornwell — 'Hearing is Deceiving': Plane Sound and Light Talk in Rameau's Nephew by Diderot (Thanx to Dennis Young) by Wilma Schoen by Michael Snow. Michael Snow — Pages from 'Rameau's Nephew'. Paul Sharits — Hearing: Seeing/Cinema as Cognition. Gilles Deleuze — On and Under Communication: Godard/Mieville's Six Fois Deux

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LESLEY STERN

FEMINISM AND CINEMA-EXCHANGES

How to pose the relation between feminism and cinema? This is the question which informed the 1979 special event at the Edinburgh Film Festival. While the event is over the question remains to be posed in the present tense. The way in which the relations between feminism and cinema were discussed at Edinburgh seemed to me enormously — and surprisingly — productive. Surprising because the event could so easily have provided a forum in which familiar positions, within the women's movement and within film culture, were confirmed in rhetorical debate. But something else occurred, a transformation which forced a rigorous reworking not only of the question of the relation between feminism and cinema but of the terms of that relation. Festival publications and special events are a challenge to the commercial art circuit and an attempt to interrogate and theorise the practice of cultural production. In refusing the mode of reception dictated by festival orthodoxy (recruitment of the 'new' into the reserve army of tradition) there is the possibility of effecting and politicising work on the audience/film relationship. Yet this remains very much a possibility — it is also possible that these interventions are merely tolerated within the organisational and economic structures as just another fringe

event. The conjunction of these institutional restraints and the politics of territorial marginality can work to preserve a unified identity which bypasses the problem of political intervention and merely constructs an alternative audience. The very notion of a 'special event', is problematic. It suggests a kind of psychodrama in which the stars, the specialists, initiate a chosen audience into the group dynamics of theoretical practice. Within this context the problem of the intersection between the cinema and psychoanalysis or politics or the avant-garde is posed as a theoretical problem to do with the specificity of cinema. This has been elaborated in recent years in terms of an investigation of the construction of the viewing subject through identification of the specific mechanisms of cinematic language. The viewing subject has to a certain extent displaced the social audience — both as object of knowledge and site of social transformation. Heterogeneity has been invoked as a conceptual tool to put the subject in crisis — the viewing subject, the 'subjects' of special events. But one gains the impression that the audience for the special events has assumed an unquestioned homogeneity in part guaranteed by unanimous agreement that the subject must be put in crisis, decentred; thus

ironically ensuring a very safe, central and functional place to the concept of the subject as an imaginary category. An assault on the ideological concept of audience (an audience constructed by ratings, effects studies, the machinery of sociology, the consumptive spectacularity film festivals) has resulted in a retreat from the social.

Although I came to Edinburgh looking forward to exploring the question of the relation between feminism and cinema I was concerned that it would take its place as one in a series of special events, marked by speciality and simultaneously relegated to marginality. How would the audience be constituted, how would the specialists be positioned, would the search for cinematic specificity prescribe the parameters of a feminist intervention? One thing that was clear was that 'feminism' as a subject has a quite different status from psychoanalysis, politics or the avant-garde. Though it intersects with these terms, feminism refers, in a way that the other topics do not, to a political movement — the women's liberation movement. This is bound to produce a different audience from the one usually occupying the space of special events, and to provoke different questions with respect to the theory/politics relation. What was interesting was how these differences were worked out within the institutional constraints of Edinburgh, which meant that amongst other things, the event was not exclusively an academic conference, a women's movement platform, a film education function, a film-makers forum or a festival of new films. And yet in a sense it was simultaneously — though not harmoniously — all these things.

However, an account of the institutional constraints is not exhaustive and neither does the location of feminism within a political movement guarantee radical transformation. What emerged during the event is the extremely problematic relation between feminism and the women's movement. To think or speak of oneself as a feminist has been to assume links with

the movement, but the status of the movement is unclear — where is it, who is it, is it always there or is it constituted anew for each event, campaign, demonstration? Or is it merely an umbrella term for a variety of practices aimed at fighting the oppression of women? In her paper 'The Subject of Feminist Film Theory/Practice' presented at the event Claire Johnston points out that any political project such as feminism, while it contains a heterogeneity of social practices, must involve a form of imaginary unity for it to be effective at all. The struggle to maintain the women's movement as an autonomous movement around a network system and a platform of political demands for social change bears witness to this political necessity.

The necessity is always there but it seems that, at least in Britain, the terms of the struggle have shifted decidedly in the last few years. The problematic nature of that imaginary unity has itself become a focus of uncertainty. If the women's movement serves as an umbrella term it is becoming increasingly unclear what constitutes the centre. To account for this would require a more detailed analysis of the political/historical context in which the women's movement has developed than is appropriate here. But what was at issue at Edinburgh was a crisis erupting in the relation between feminism and the women's movement, and between the strategies of ideological practice and political campaigning. This cannot be explained in terms of symmetrical oppositions: feminism/women's movement; ideological practice/political campaigning; rather, a number of contradictions have been generated which cannot be easily reconciled by an imaginary unity or expressed by a platform of demands. This is felt in part by an undermining of positionality. And it is in this space that the possibility for transformation of fixed positions, can be effected. Such transformation is not automatic and I do not intend to celebrate an undermining of positionality as

intrinsically radical. What is significant is the way in which the 'Feminism and Cinema' event worked to articulate this crisis.

The question of sexual difference is precariously implicated in this crisis. How to speak sexual difference? As an issue sexual difference has always been central to feminist practices, but it has been posed in a variety of ways with differing emphases on the biological/social/cultural/psychological. In terms of politics it has generated debates about autonomy, separation, reformism, specificity. Now it is being spoken, insistently but with uncertainty. The issue is being shifted, assumptions are being called into question and new meanings are being produced. This new direction has drawn extensively on developments within psychoanalytic theory and theories of ideology, particularly where these areas converged on an exploration of the construction of the sexed subject in language. The attention to language has allotted a privileged position to artistic practices which are seen to occupy a crucial site for ideological struggle, for both understanding and intervening in the processes by which sexual differences, and attendant notions of power and pleasure, are produced. Within this terrain the question of how to speak sexual difference, for feminists, is intricately involved with the question of a woman's language — its possible construction, its various possibilities for subversion, transformation and liberation.

Within film theory, attention to the construction of the subject as an effect of the text's structuring of desire has meant that much of the work on the viewing subject has hinged on the question of the articulation of sexual difference. There is a convergence between some feminist concerns and concerns more specifically to do with the cinema, the reasons for which are overdetermined and complex. It is not as though there is the theory of cinema on one side and the practice of feminism on the other; the

relation is fraught with fissures and difficulties.

While the question of sexual difference is central it is conceived of in a variety of different, contradictory ways. The conceptualisation of desire, a theorisation of its inscription within cinematic language, has been useful for understanding the fascination of the cinema in its ideological dimension. This has often led to the development of strategies of subversion which concentrate on fragmentation of the unified subject, but in so far as this work is still located within the problematic of castration it promotes a politics of negation and blocks the question of feminine desire. Within film theory this question is now being explored from a feminist perspective but there are still problems in that the subject is seen as an effect of the text. But if it is in the intersection between the viewer as an historical subject and the text in its structuring of point of view that meaning is produced then the issue of sexual difference must be posed as a social and political question. To know how to pose this, how to use theoretical knowledge to effect change is difficult, acutely so when confronting the disjunction between notions of the social audience and the viewing subject. Such a confrontation was effected at Edinburgh — less as a drama than a sub-text which erupted in a clash of discourses. The social context, the audience, provided a scenario for the articulation, in language, of differences, which forced a theorisation of the very practice we were engaged in there at Edinburgh — with all its implications for elsewhere.

Central to the relation, then, of feminism and cinema are the issues of language and audience. The advance publicity for the event signalled some of the difficulties in conceptualising this:

The presentations will discuss the dilemma facing feminist theory and practice: while attempting to build a new language of film, relevant and comprehensible, the

very project of challenge and change restricts the audience reached.

Important questions about marginality and political intervention are raised here. But how can a 'new language' possibly be 'relevant and comprehensible?' The implication is that the new does not constitute a definitive break but incorporates a process of change — the attempt to *build* a new language of film. Integral to this process of constructing a new language is the construction of audience. The political question is how to construct this audience; the difficulties of putting into practice the political imperative have to do with the *restrictive* nature of the enterprise. Working against the notion of construction is the idea that the audience is already 'given' by the language just as the language defines and delimits the audience. Who then constitutes this 'given' audience? Is the audience composed of those who produce the language — avant-garde film-makers and theorists, but not of women and feminists who do not have access to that language? Or, is the audience composed of another group who produce the language — feminists concerned with the construction of a woman's language, but less with the specificity of film language — thus not reaching out and challenging women who may not be feminists and men who may need to be confronted or converted? What is indicated here is a dilemma that has to do with circularity. The political question of how to/whether to utilise the subversive potential of that circularity or how to/whether to break out if it involves questions of textual practice and social practice focused on the conditions of exhibition, distribution, reception. These are the sort of problems, that informed the posing of the relation between feminism and cinema at Edinburgh. The audience at the event, in itself, constituted the dilemma. For certainly the activities of the event — screenings, presentations, forums, workshops, small group discussions —

constructed subject positions, but a number of pressures — social practices, ideological perspectives, political identities bore upon these positions.

Language evokes difference, but how to put into effect a new and different language? How does this new language mark itself as different from the old? If feminism is what marks this new language as distinctive, what is it distinguished from? Is the difference to be located in a feminist/patriarchal opposition? This is problematic, because it both attributes a unity to the term feminism and structures a symmetry between two conceptually distinct categories. Feminism refers both to a political practice and to an elaboration of an analysis and critique. Patriarchy refers to a social system and the ideology it perpetuates. Is the difference then to be located in a female/male opposition? This makes more sense in terms of symmetry, but precisely because of this it undermines the political dimension of feminism. The male/female opposition can be read as either biological or social, but either way it runs the danger of an appeal to essentialism and recourse to a counter-cultural practice as a matter of choice rather than struggle. The inscription of intentionality poses language as the by-product of fully constituted subjects, rather than posing the subject as spoken by/produced by language. Is the difference then to be located in a feminine/masculine opposition? This makes more sense theoretically but is also problematic: it provides a model for understanding the way in which language structures sexual difference but does not set different languages, as such, in opposition. Yet this is the strength and appeal of this model — feminine/masculine does not prescribe the terms of an opposition so much as it provides the key to understanding the way in which differences (which have to do with imbalance not antithesis) are structured (not given). Femininity and masculinity refer to psychic categories which are not reducible to gender. But what is significant is that they appear, in our

culture, to be equivalent to gender identity. The question is how does this process take place, how is this naturalisation instituted, to what extent is identity shaped by the unconscious, and supported by ideology? What appears to be a natural symmetry and therefore a homogeneity is secured at the cost of a heterogeneity, the multiplicity of differences that is opened up in the play, the plurality, of femininity and masculinity. An understanding of the way in which language in structuring subject positions structures a system of sexual difference which is oppressive of the feminine, of feminine desire, can provide the tools to intervene in the dominant language, to subvert its dominance by exploring ways in which the feminine can be spoken as difference. However there are real dangers in such an approach — it can lead to a privileging of the text as object of knowledge, at the expense of the social conditions of both production and reception. It can also institute linguistic strategies which may well be subversive within certain contexts (eg academia) but which are nevertheless institutionalised and legitimised by a class structure which reproduces oppression in a different guise.

The Edinburgh event asked how to pose the relation between feminism and cinema — a question which is enmeshed in the problem of how to conceptualise, how to speak about a new film language, what critical and theoretical language to employ. The structure of the event did not help — there was no direct correlation between screenings and presentations. None of the papers presented took as their subject a specific film or attempted a detailed reading/commentary. Rather, the papers and two main forums on film magazines and feminist film-making practice focused on questions of history, the relation between film language and a feminist 'voice', feminist point of view; the problem of audience, and the dialectic of production and reception. There were criticisms that the structure privileged theory against practice. What seems to me more significant is that the structure resisted the resort to

practical criticism. Films were not utilised to provide answers. The framework of the event forced a thinking through, an arguing out of various questions including the question of feminism, so that they could be brought to bear upon films, particularly in the workshops and discussion groups. Discussion in these contexts was thus deflected from the search for the exemplary feminist film via consciousness-raising procedures and directed more towards asking how, when, and in what contexts can a film be pertinent to various feminist purposes and pleasures.

This is not to play down the impact of films screened. But what the event did demonstrate was the necessity for any political development, for a feminist project of challenge and change, to theorise the notion of audience. For what emerged with startling clarity is that films do not speak for themselves; there is no such thing as an essentially feminist film, there is no singular feminist position or critique. There is only difference. And differences are articulated in differing languages. This is integral to the dilemma of 'attempting to build a new language of film'. But is it merely inevitable, or the basis for building a position of strength or is it a dilemma that constitutes a danger of divisiveness? Is it

a problem common to oppressed people at the point of formulating a new language with which to name that oppression, for the history of oppression has prevented the development of any unified language among its subjects?

And if so is it

crucial for those of us working in the area of feminist film criticism to mend this rift, confront the agony, and begin developing a synthesis of maximally effective critical practice?

(from 'The Crisis of Naming in Feminist Film Criticism' by Ruby Rich, presented by her at the event, and reprinted from *Jump Cut* no 19 1979).

The event did not function to reconcile differences or to formulate a unified language. Indeed, much of the debate centred on the question of oppression in so far as it relates to suppression — not of language as such but as it is manifested in language. It seems impossible to separate oppression from suppression, but also necessary to avoid collapsing the ideological into the political. This fine line between the political and the ideological, materialised as a tightrope on which differences were walked out, talked out: is it a political priority to counter the dominant ideology by voicing with clarity a coherent and unified speech ('relevant and comprehensible') or is it a function of oppression to suppress that which is different and to homogenise diversity, in which case is the political priority to oppose unity by activating the contradictions and the diversity, which unity seeks to contain? I think it important to stress that the differences articulated at the event were not simple expressions of established positions but generated, in part, by the inescapable problem of how to talk about the 'new', about a new film language. Most of the films screened were new productions but were not simply on display as a festival of celebration — rather their putting into play strategies of difference provoked a struggle within language within the event. This struggle implies real differences, not simply a pluralism, but it does not imply the divisiveness of defeat.

The spectrum of differences at the event were roughly represented in the forum of film magazines. It is interesting that this forum, and the event as a whole, drew attention to different notions of audience and to the differing activities of reading enmeshed in the film theory/practice nexus and its relation to the women's movement. Of the four magazines only two, the American *Camera Obscura* and the German *Frauen Und Film*, are specifically concerned with women and film, but their orientation is quite different. The British *m/f* is a feminist journal not specifically concerned with the cinema. Its more broadly feminist

orientation however does not guarantee a secure location in the women's movement, no doubt because of its attempt to theorise feminism. *Jump Cut* is an American film magazine not exclusively concerned with feminism but giving high priority to coverage of women's films, and ensuring equal representation of women on the editorial collective. Without imposing a false polarisation it is useful to look at the differences between *Camera Obscura* and *Jump Cut* since they bear on some of the central problems of the relation between feminism and cinema.

Speakers representing both magazines addressed the questions of audience and language in markedly different ways. *Camera Obscura* sees its audience as necessarily restricted at the moment but sees the building of an audience as part of its project. The restrictive nature of the enterprise is partly justified by the argument that formal experimentation is inherently more political than realism and from the refusal to countenance any case for 'progressive' realism. *Camera Obscura* is interested in examining the ways in which sexual difference is structured/assigned by film language, how the spectator is constructed/constructs meaning, and the mechanisms of pleasure. *Jump Cut* stresses accessibility of language as a prerequisite for political effectivity, for reaching an audience, and is concerned that the political dimension of feminist films is being undermined by a brand of formalism (identified as the avant-garde of film-making and criticism) which, by concentrating on aesthetics and on experimental language, obscures feminist content. Against this, a new language must be invented, a language which will clarify the distinction between that which is feminist and that which is not. Here the old language is seen as male (the classic Hollywood narrative as the cinema of the fathers, the avant-garde as the cinema of the sons) and the new language as female. It was stressed that this new language does not have to be obscure; on the contrary it is a political necessity that it be relevant

and comprehensible. An example of what this language would be like was given in Mary Daly's replacement of the term sexism with *gynophobia*, a term which, it was argued, has the virtue of greater precision and clarity.

It is difficult to grasp what is meant by *political* as used both by *Camera Obscura* and *Jump Cut*. The confusions arise, I think, not just because of a disparity in usage but because of a fundamental problem that is not, in either case, directly addressed, but which informs both positions. This has to do with the relation of feminism to the Women's Movement, further complicated by the conceptualisation of the cinema as an institution. In *Camera Obscura's* case it is difficult to see how formal experimentation can *inherently* be more *political* (though the argument is not unfamiliar to readers of *Screen*). What is being referred to, it seems, are certain textual strategies which subvert the security of the spectator and thus put in crisis the unified subject, guarantor and support of ideology. What is being reached for is a notion of textual practice as ideological subversion. This is explored in terms of a quite specific subversion, that of the feminine — articulated precisely as difference in the texts of, for example, Yvonne Rainer, Jackie Raynal, Marguerite Duras and most pertinent to the event, Chantal Akerman. *Camera Obscura* does not call for a female language as a political weapon but its examination of the modalities of the feminine voice, of the mechanisms of pleasure as related to the structuring of sexual difference undoubtedly engages with questions of oppression and suppression and is extremely relevant to feminism. This work seems to me both important and pleasurable, but to attribute to any text an intrinsic political character is to ignore the resistances, which are demonstrated by an analysis of ideology. Films do not have an autonomy in determining their mode of reception; textual strategy as ideological practice only provides certain limited conditions for transformation. To privilege

the text as autonomous object, to privilege the construction of the viewing subject over the historical context in which social audiences are constituted, in which sexual difference is socially constituted, runs the danger of misconstruing the site of political effectivity. For any feminist project of challenge and change it is necessary to take into account and work on, the social audience with all its differing and contradictory elements. What this points to is the urgency of attention to the extra-textual.

In contrast to *Camera Obscura*, *Jump Cut* does not waste any time pondering the text's relation to the viewing subject but starts with an assumption of the audience as an empirical category and as site of political intervention. Because of this *Jump Cut* may appear to offer a more lucid and appealing account of the political instance and it certainly appeared to satisfy a repeated demand from a number of participants for comprehensible and relevant language. It is therefore important to examine some contradictions in this invocation of the political which were masked by a rhetorical zeal. The logic of the *Jump Cut* argument would suggest that political change follows as a consequence of relevant and comprehensible language and it is the strategy employed in using this language that produces the audience as site of transformation. But in fact *Jump Cut's* argument is quite the opposite: the political priority is to reach an audience, and it is this which determines the need for relevant and comprehensible language. Here the notion of the political as transformation is elided. If radical politics has to do with transformation then it involves changing and creating — not merely reaching — audiences. It is difficult to see how reaching an audience can, in itself, constitute a radical activity, though it may appear to do so in some varieties of populism. *Jump Cut's* authoritative alignment of the extra-textual with the political is misleading. Both 'audience' and 'politics' function as

rhetorical categories and there is no theorisation of either film language or subjectivity seen in historical/social terms. Against theory, politics is located in criticism; the task of feminist film-makers and critics becomes to explain feminism. But to whom? If the audience is assumed to be the women's movement the exercise is redundant; if the audience is 'outside' the women's movement how can the language, not separable from ideology, be immediately relevant and comprehensible? In terms of language *Jump Cut* seems to be arguing for replacement rather than transformation. If 'gynophobia' merely stands in place of 'sexism', it functions as an alternative it does not serve to subvert or transform. *Jump Cut* does not make claims for an essentially female language, but there seems to be some notion of the new as embodied in a feminist language marked by difference. An exploration of notions of a new language is central to the question of the relation between feminism and cinema, but how can this 'difference' be understood when written/spoken language and the language of film is seen as basically unproblematic. Feminism, with all the problems it embodies as a descriptive term, must be seen as a historical process; we cannot afford to see the audience as a fixed entity, waiting to receive the appropriate word.

The urgency of re-thinking the audience in terms of historical process was highlighted in discussion arising out of the film-makers panel. Both the Sheffield Women's Film Group and the London Women's Film Group were formed as collectives directly out of the women's movement for the purpose of producing primarily campaign films to serve that movement. Discussion revolved around changing circumstances: the struggle for women to gain control over aspects of production together with the instrumentalist notion of film-making meant the suppression of political/aesthetic differences in early films which is now surfacing more strongly and being provoked by the impact of film theory and

the evident limitations of making films for a converted audience. With the advent of a new generation of women coming out of film schools, the struggle to acquire skills and gain control over production is taking on a different character. It is not that this simply guarantees a supply of technicians but rather it focuses more acutely theoretical questions about the production of meaning, about the relation between politics and filmic structures. Meaning production is clearly related to the material conditions of production which raises problems about collectivity and authorship. Sally Potter, whose film *Thriller* (1979) was shown at the festival drew attention to the traditional organisation of collectives for the purpose of producing campaign films. Now that a lot more feminist films are being made in experimental and fictional modes (the domain of the author/artist) what implications does this have for collective organisation? Women's film-making collectives have placed themselves outside the mainstream industry but are still enmeshed in the capitalist system and articulate with other modes of independent film production. What is required as a foundation for effective political intervention is less a notion of collective authorship (of women united in one voice) than examining how to develop a non-hierarchical division of labour and how to inscribe the process of labour within the film-text. This raises problems to do with representation: do you simply represent that labour by showing, demonstrating, the labour involved in a splice for instance, or does the problem of how to inscribe the process of labour involve issues of writing and reading, issues to do with the construction of the subject also as a process? If the relation between feminism and cinema is located within the broader problematic of representation then the politics of feminist film must involve an investigation of, a challenging of, oppressive structures of representation and thus involve work on subject positions, on the structuring of point of view and the

construction of identity. But what this raises, what was raised at Edinburgh, is at once the difficulty of specifying a particular audience and the necessity to elaborate the notion of process beyond the confines of a fetishistic notion of the subject (of an individual text) in process — to spend more time writing about films during the processes of production rather than treating texts as completed films, and to work upon exhibition and distribution as a process engaging different audiences and creating spaces where differences in reception can more positively engage with the notion of reading as both productive and pleasurable.

Sue Clayton, talking about the production of *The Song of the Shirt* (1979) raised further issues about the politics of collective production in relation to audience. *The Song of the Shirt*, by the Film and History Project, came out of the work of a feminist history group. Before shooting, the makers were in touch with various groups to inform their research and to try to establish what sort of audience existed for the film. What became apparent was the need to build an audience, which was seen not simply a result of the film coming into being, but which actually informed production exhibition and distribution. *The Song of the Shirt* is not an all-woman production and this had repercussions on the division of labour in the film-making process. This is not represented as such in the film but is inscribed in more general terms within the filmic discourse on the sexual division of labour and its modes of representation. How does the sexual division of labour mesh with problems of sexual difference and how does the inscription of authorial voice mesh with the politics of production? The situation of a mixed collective working on a feminist project is different from an all-women group or a mixed group in which the director, the authority, is a woman. What implications does this have for the building of a new language and, a feminist voice and point of view in the cinema? What is interesting about both

The Song of the Shirt and *Thriller* is that authorship cannot be simply read off from the film. Both these films were situated in a discussion in the event on film-making which focused on questions about the construction of the viewing subject and also crucially, the construction of audience as a process, in which is located the very dilemma of the relation between feminism and the women's movement.

The Song of the Shirt explores questions of history and of representation and in the intersection of history and representation it inserts, as a question, the relation of feminism and cinema. The film is situated in the 1830s and 40s and looks at the position, and positioning by a variety of discourses, of women in the clothes trade. The heterogeneity of discourses is posed in historic/social terms and the effort to contain and order difference seen in materialist terms. It is not an historical film but a film that looks at the construction of history; it thus utilises primary sources — such as government commissions, newspaper reports, lithographs, novels and music as citations set against each other, taken apart, put in pieces. The film simultaneously investigates its own mode of production through juxtaposing different material means of representation — acted scenes, written texts, commentary, video material, still photography and graphics. The film does not labour any point about relevance — it is not made in the service of any specific campaign, but what it does point to is the need for continuing and continuous research and analysis, as a prerequisite for a feminist understanding of the positions ascribed to women by and within state structures. This is not the 'meaning' of the film, it is only one way of using it. Yet this raises further problems. Is the film's feminism so diffuse that the film could be appropriated for non-feminist purposes? Such a question is provoked by the difficulty of locating a feminine voice in the text. The film raises problems about voice, about origin, about a feminine and feminist language which I think are worth

pursuing because they confront essentialist notions and introduce questions of class and representation. Certainly *The Song of the Shirt* is open to misappropriation — the film itself demonstrates the contradictory nature of discursive histories, but what this demonstrates is precisely that a song, a film, any text does not speak for itself; its meaning is constructed in social/historical contexts.

Thriller relates to *The Song of the Shirt* in surprising ways. The 'heroine' of *Thriller* is a 'Distressed Needlewoman' and her fears and desires are spoken in a way that is impossible for *The Song of the Shirt*, and yet the problem of voice, of the possibilities for a feminine and feminist language are provoked in similar ways. *Thriller* rereads and reworks the opera *La Bohème*, rearticulating the story through the structures of suspense with the heroine Mimi treating her death as a murder, asking 'who dunnit?' and why. *Thriller* explores the conditions of Mimi's tragedy, playing and replaying of scenes from the opera introducing a juxtapositioning in which a search for the origin of the enigma is displaced by an excessive multiplicity of possibilities. The film opens with manic laughter, provoked by the book the woman is reading, a book whose title is withheld from us. What's so funny? we ask — an enigma is posed. The end returns to the beginning and the title of the book is revealed: *Tel Quel*. Sally Potter has explained the reference to *Tel Quel* thus:

Mimi's strategies become a reference to the experiences of many women emerging from an undefined experience of their oppression and then encountering the contradictions of a supposedly revolutionary theory mediated through an exclusive and class-bound use of language.

As heroine within *La Bohème* Mimi is a product of male desire — functioning thus for both the male artists within the fiction and for the spectator. In reworking the scenario to explore feminine

desire the text engages with questions of sexual differences and the construction of the viewing subject. We do not find a female language as an alternative but engage with the struggle to speak feminine desire as it is played out on the terrain of oppression/suppression.

Thriller might work to dissolve identity as it is more traditionally constructed in terms of sexual difference, but this is not all. Crucially it works upon point of view and here is its pertinence to feminism. It does not proclaim a political message and thus does not determine its audience; again it is a question of how it is appropriated.

The kind of questions which films like *The Song of the Shirt* and *Thriller* raise about film language, the language of theory, and audience, can be located in discussion of the relation between feminist film theory and practice and the radical avant-garde. Both Pam Cook and Laura Mulvey in their presentations and papers addressed this relation ('The Point of Expression in Avant-Garde Film' by Pam Cook from *Catalogue: British Film Institute Productions*, 1977-78, and 'Feminism, Film and the Avant-Garde' by Laura Mulvey from *Framework*, no 10, Spring 1979). Pam Cook stressed the urgency of directing attention to the structuring of point of view in film texts and drew attention to links between concerns of the women's movement and the film avant-garde at the problematic site of personal expression. The notion of self-expression with its emphasis on the personal, the intimate and the domestic has always had a place, often a contradictory one, within the women's movement. Her presentation struggled with these contradictions and the distance between her presentation and paper represented the way in which those struggles were articulated at Edinburgh, provoked in part by the convergence of a number of new films dealing with aspects of the personal, of authorship, of feminine writing. Patriarchal culture works to fix and contain heterogeneity and one of its

functions in constituting sexual difference is to marginalise women's discourse to the sphere of the domestic and private. But if this discourse is seen from the perspective of the problematic relationship of the individual subject to language then an exploration of the domestic sphere, of personal and private language, need not be retrograde, it can be an activity of 'splitting or dispersal' which questions voice and point of view and which engages with the heterogeneity of sexuality. This is not to situate the 'problematic relationship of the individual subject to language' purely within the realm of text/reader but to acknowledge that within the women's movement there are diverse audiences and different points of view and rather than classifying films it is more productive to mobilise texts that pose point of view as problematic.

Many of the shorter (or, more accurately, non-feature) films screened at Edinburgh articulated the personal through explorations of relationships between women, particularly within the family — mothers, daughters, sisters. Frequently these relationships were enmeshed in a discourse on women and language — the problems of writing, speaking, filming. *Angel in the House* (Jane Jackson 1979) and *She (Overlooking, Overworking) while ...* (Karyn Kay 1979) took as their subjects young women trying to read, to write, within (out of) the domestic arena. Both films offer points of identification but rework the coherence of realism through textual strategies. On one level *Angel in the House* is the story of a young woman who goes home for the holidays where her attempts to write a novel are interrupted by strained sessions with her mother watching home movies of a wedding. But this account is misleading, for the play of textual levels renders uncertain whose story it is. As well as acted scenes, there are quotations (the home movies are a quote too, but also reposition a mode of film-making in terms of its inscription of audience, its assertion of 'home' as a movement of loss and separation),

voice-over letters from mother to daughter, readings of Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* and *Professions for Women*, *She ...* depicts a woman distracted from work (from writing and reading texts such as *Ecrits*, of *Grammatology*, Freud) by a woman through the window engaged in housework. The narrating voice-over shifts between 'I' and 'she'. Again there is a confusion as to whose story it is, a discourse on the ambivalent pleasures of reading and writing. *Often during the Day* (Joanna Davis 1979) explores the domestic from a different angle. It describes a kitchen, the sphere of the private allocated to woman. But there is an analysis of this privatisation through means that are quite unprivate, impersonal. The first person narration is split between several male or female voices, and is juxtaposed with a series of images, fragments of quotes, and written texts taken from Ann Oakley's *The Sociology of Housework*. The filmic dialectic sets in motion a questioning of the relation between the private and the personal. In *I Stand here Ironing* (Midge Mackenzie 1979) a woman performing the household chore of ironing spins a reverie on her relationship with her daughter. *Daughter Rite* (Michelle Citron 1978) also explores mother/daughter as well as sister/sibling relationships. Much of the film is set in the kitchen where two women 'speak out' their feelings. Their relationship is unclear — are they sisters, do they refer to a shared mother or separate women? The film incorporates home movie footage and utilises a variety of cinematic forms in a play with fiction, documentary, truth, reconstruction. Michelle Citron said that she is interested in tracing the history of forms in feminist film practice *Daughter Rite* provides a context for discussing modes of repression operative in the relationship between women as instituted by a more general oppression and also offers a way into analysis of modes of representation. Very different in the way that it investigates mechanisms by which meaning is produced in films is *Exchanges*

(Bette Gordon 1979). It provides no point of identification in its deconstruction of the relationship between image and sound, visual codes and language, memory and narrative; it is impossible to identify a speaking subject, a feminine voice. Yet its concern is very much with the way in which cinematic modes structure point of view and the implications that this has for representations of female sexuality.

It is clearly unsatisfactory to categorise these films either under thematic headings such as mother/ daughter films or to place them in the genre of the personal or to class them as a sub-section of the avant-garde. There is however a marked convergence of concerns which cannot simply be called 'feminist language' but does indicate something of what is happening in the Women's Movement. I think it would be wrong to interpret this as a retreat from the political into the personal. Nor is it another version of the personal as political. Rather, it indicates an uncertainty about the transparency of language as expression and an examination of the ways in which our identity as women, our experience of everyday life, is shaped by forces which cannot be accounted for by intentionality and consciousness. In the films this is manifested by formal experimentation which attempts to work, from a feminist perspective, on the signifier. As Laura Mulvey argues:

There is a link with those elements in feminist film theory that demand a return to tabula rasa and question how meaning is made as necessary steps towards revolutionising woman's image in patriarchal representation. But women cannot be satisfied with an aesthetic that restricts counter-cinema to form alone. Feminism - is bound to its politics; its experimentation cannot exclude work on content, and it has, in this way, more in common with the avant-garde tradition that has attempted to radicalise the signifier.

Feminism is bound to its politics: What is troubling about the tendency which these films suggest is the inscription of the political. What are the signs, the signifiers, of transformation, of challenge and change? *Exchanges* marks a much more radical break than any of the others and I would argue that this is not merely formal — but the film does require work both from the audience and to produce an audience; others argue that it belongs in the traditional avant-garde condemned by its formalism to irrelevance and incomprehension in the women's movement. But what is troubling about some of the other films is that the way in which self-expression articulated as subject matter lends itself to too easy an appropriation by a one kind of political activity — consciousness raising. In other words the films can become a spring-board for discussion of, say, our relationships to our mothers and daughters but treated in phenomenological terms without the kind of analysis which can effect transformation. There are contradictions in my argument — I said earlier that some of the films lend themselves to say too easy an appropriation by a certain kind of political activity. In fact the point has more to do with the struggles over appropriation, the contexts created for reception, rather than intrinsic qualities of individual films. But in this light I think a film such as *Daughter Rite* provokes as many difficulties as *Exchanges*. The contradictions in my perspective have to do, I think, with confusions over the meshing and contesting of categories of the personal/political/ formal which informed much of the debate at Edinburgh and emerged often as an opposition between theory/experience, a struggle to voice the articulation between feminism and film language.

How, in the context of new developments and looking back at the relationship between feminism and cinema do we formulate a conception of the cinema as an arena of ideological struggle? In her paper Claire Johnston argued that

We are now at a stage historically when I think it is becoming possible to theorise a conception of ideological struggle within feminist film theory/practice more concretely.

And Laura Mulvey:

The future directions of 16 mm and of experimental film are uncertain, but the conjuncture between their growth and the historic eruption of feminist politics is unprecedented in the history of the arts, there, at last, the demands of women can have a determining effect on aesthetics, as the work of feminist film theorists and film-makers gains strength and influence within the experimental sphere.

But there are different ways of reading history and different ways of putting the subject in crisis. For some, an alliance with the avant-garde, and an emphasis on heterogeneity is dangerous. Ruby Rich, in 'The Crisis of Naming in Feminist Film Criticism' (op cit) argues that the situation today is precarious, that the term feminist as applied to films is too vague, a 'naming malpractice' whereby patriarchal language (including the avant-garde as the 'cinema of the sons') appropriates and misnames our products thus strategically disenfranchising the feminist voice. The way out of the crisis is to find more precise names:

To name is to take possession, and the time is at hand to possess, finally, our own culture by name.

As opposed to a strategy of unfixing what is proposed is a search for a *proper* name, and her 'experimental glossary' produces the terms 'validative', 'correspondence', 'Medusan' and 'projectile'. But what do these names represent?

The names are primarily descriptive. They serve to classify groups of films. Her paper was ostensibly more concerned with constructing the guidelines by which feminist language can be distinguished

from non-feminist obscurantism than with sifting feminist from non-feminist films. But the two projects are not separate and the term of unification is criticism. The aim of criticism is seen as correct interpretation based on accurate description. The function of feminist criticism, then, is at once exegetical and political. The linguistic problem is located on the side of criticism — the films, as objects of criticism, it would appear, are clear enough, they merely require the correct language of mediation in order to avoid political misappropriation. So what is being reached for is a correspondence between subject and object, where the subject is feminist film criticism and the object is feminist film. The ideal is to be attained — and the crisis averted — when the metalanguage mirrors its object language. Earlier I stated that the structure of the event resisted the resort to practical criticism, the pressure is here and more generally in demands for political clarity against the language of theory, for the grouping of individual films under sub-headings of feminism is a descriptive exercise aiming at order and elucidation — individual films are substituted for a conceptualisation of feminist ideological practice. Differences are interpreted as variations on a theme, not as contradictions. What is refused (perhaps ironically in this approach which is so assertive of the political) is any notion of struggle — within language and between the various discourses which cross any text, be it a film text, a film review, or a conference paper.

The term 'feminist' may be pluralised into sub-sections, but as a term descriptive of films it is held to be self-evident and exhaustive. Similarly, different theoretical approaches to the cinema are held to be variations of a singular feminism, so where the 'British' and 'American' approaches are characterised as pessimistic and optimistic respectively the differences are differences in attitudes rather than ones informed by political and theoretical perspective. The *Jump*

Cut intervention as posed in Ruby's paper, tends to preclude an interrogation of the intersection between feminism and cinema where meanings are produced between text and audience. This closure is effected by promoting the language of criticism, of illumination as an oppositional answer to the language of obfuscation, and thus posing language as a problem only in terms of inadequacy or abuse. A difficulty is thus sidestepped, to do with the question of difference, the difference between the old language and the new, between cinematic language and the language, written and spoken, which attempts to speak 'about' that cinematic language, between male and female language, between masculinity and femininity as structured by various languages.

The argument for naming evades certain difficulties but it is inserted within the dilemma of how to build a new language. In part it is a reaction against a tendency which whilst refusing fixity, classification, nevertheless invokes key terms such as 'heterogeneity' with a confidence and repetition that is tantamount to nomination. The problem has to do with the intersection of different political and class positions, that constitute an audience. This is a real problem for, if films do not speak for themselves, neither does theory. There is an inevitable disjunction between cinematic language and the metalanguage of theory but there are more possibilities for transformation in confronting this disjunction, than a correspondence between the metalanguage of criticism and the object language of film. Whilst we need to be wary of the way theoretical language is used, to acknowledge it as a site of struggle seems much more politically productive than to regard it as intrinsically male and deliberately obscure: Experimentation with film language invokes problems about speech — how to speak the new and how to transform not just content but the articulation of ideas and desires? The Chantal Akerman

films shown in a retrospective of the festival pointed up many of the difficulties to do with language — Ruby Rich takes *Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai de Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* as an example of naming malpractice:

The film is a polemically feminist work on every level of its analysis, style, and representation, but it has been received in critical language devoted to sanctifying the aesthetics stripped of political consequence.

It is described as

the first film to legitimise housework, showing a woman's activities in the home in real time, to communicate with veracity the alienation of woman in the nuclear family as it exists under advanced industrial capitalism.

For some women at the event *Jeanne Dielman* was not a 'polemically feminist work', it was not even considered feminist on any level. For others it was seen as feminist but not immediately so. For others the film's feminism had little to do with a polemic on housework and an analysis of the nuclear family under advanced capitalism but was to be located in the fact that the film's subject was a woman and her personal space, looked at from a female viewpoint, thus breaking with voyeurism. For others this viewpoint was interesting not because it was the result of woman using the camera but because of its implications for the viewer, for a structuring of feminine desire. These different responses demonstrate not only that the film's meaning is constructed diversely by the diversity of the audience but also that the film, in provoking questions about its inscription of feminism resists a singular, theological meaning. Ruby Rich's description of the film tends to foreclose discussion in an attempt to suppress the difficulties, to force the film into a strait-jacket of the relevant and comprehensible, to stress its political

importance by the activity of naming.

The Akerman films (*Je, Tu, Il, Elle*, *Jeanne Dielman, News From Home* and *Les Rendez-vous D'Anna*) occupied a privileged position in that they constituted a body of work, by an identifiable author with a place in film history, as a retrospective within the main Film Festival. The films served as useful focus for question to do with language and audience. None of them are overtly political but they do raise questions about the cinematic articulation of a feminine and/or feminist point of view, and therefore generate a discourse on politics and pleasure. They also raise questions about reaching/constructing audiences, and about challenge and change through the subversion of marginality or the accessibility of success.

Is the move from more experimental and avant-garde film-making into big budget productions to be seen as a progression, a break with the restricted audience for feminist films, or is it a compromise? Ruby Rich suggested that *Les Rendez-vous D'Anna* represents a retreat into the cinematic at the expense of feminist concerns. She argued that the emphasis on formalism has meant that what has gone unnamed in criticism of the Akerman films is the area of sexuality. It seems to me that this is not attributable to a refusal of feminism, either within the films or criticism, but because it is extremely difficult to identify the textual discourse on sexuality. It is not as though form has been privileged over content, for where indeed is the content? One could argue that *Je, Tu, Il, Elle* depicts a lengthy fucking scene between two women and that *Les Rendez-vous D'Anna* shows Anna's relationships with men but only refers to her female lover as an absence. But to deduce from this a progression (or regression) from positive to negative is positively perverse for what it assumes is categories of social sexuality which are validated (or negated) by the act of representation. What it refuses is the way in which the text disintegrates

notions of any coherent, fully constituted sexuality. The scene referred to in *Je, Tu, Il, Elle* is not a literal representation and indeed subverts, through excess, the female form as spectacle for voyeurism. Neither can the scene be read as a discrete representation — it is inserted within the text in a discourse on writing, the impossibility of writing, writing as feminine desire, writing as provoked by absence but writing which is absolutely *not* representation. The opening sequence in which the woman attempts to write to an absent lover has to do with the body, with sexuality but it is not a representation of the body rather it is a difference dispersed in the body of the text. At the centre of *Les Rendez-vous D'Anna* is the sequence in which mother and daughter are lying in bed together and Anna speaks of making love with another woman 'and for some strange reason I thought of you'. This is neither a negative nor positive 'view' of lesbian relations but the voice of the unconscious; the mother/daughter relationship is reworked to explore the way in which a heterogeneous sexuality is structured through mechanisms of repression to construct sexual difference, a repression which for women is never successfully resolved, always turning on a paradoxical identity with the mother.

Much discussion of these films revolved around the question of identity and the cinematic structuring of point-of-view where this is not confined to the look but to questions of who is speaking and to whom. Where to locate the feminine, how to read a feminist inscription within the workings of the film language? Ruby Rich raises a pertinent point about that which has gone unnamed in criticism — sexuality; but it is not a problem to do with nomination or necessarily a male oppression of feminist content. For women too it is difficult to articulate, partly because the film language refuses translation, but also because it inserts the question of the feminine within a problematisation of heterosexuality. The

positioning of the subject by the text intersects with the varieties of lived experience, social/sexual identity, political perspectives that mesh the historical subjects constituting the audience. And what is also inserted is the earlier question of the conjunction between experimental cinema and 'self-expression', the hazardous area of the personal and private.

The view of woman's discourse involving many discourses and thus reintroducing the possibility of identifications was put forward by Christine Gledhill and in her paper ('Recent Developments in Feminist Criticisms' from *Quarterly Review of Film Studies*, vol 3 no 4, Fall 1978) she called for a reworking of the notion of 'lived experience'. Her criticism that much recent film theory was negative in its implications for a feminist practice involved an argument for a return to some kind of realist epistemology and attention to the extra-textual. Claire Johnston similarly stressed the important need to assess the power and role of recognition and identification for political effectivity in feminist film practice and the need to move beyond the text as autonomous object to the social conditions of production and reception. But against Christine Gledhill she argued that psychoanalysis can be appropriated as a political weapon and identified the real problem as 'theoreticism'. What is evident here is an effort to reposition theory — in part a response arising out of a conceptualisation of practice, always an issue in the women's movement but focused particularly acutely at Edinburgh. However the simple distinction theory/practice masks a number of shifting relations. In part it serves to suppress differing political perspectives which are not reducible to a theory/practice opposition. But there are also problems about what constitutes practice and how it is positioned *against* theory. In some instances practice means the activity of making films, in others it means that which is not abstract, in others it means

political practice as lived experience.

There was no simple division between theorists and practitioners evident at Edinburgh. Much of the debate on marginalisation was promoted by film-makers with proposals for women to organise within bodies such as the Independent Film-makers' Association and the Fourth Channel Group. There was much discussion of the failures of such attempts in the past and the need to theorise and organise political activity. More seriously there were charges that discussion of theory had dominated at the expense of production. In fact I think it was not theorists as such who were privileged but the women who were asked to present papers and lead discussions.

In response to this theorists almost retreated to the position that theory does not have to struggle in the way that those involved in production do. It is simply not the case, however, that theory is a unitary 'subject' — the theoretical work that those of us in academic institutions engage in is constantly under attack and involves struggles that extend to teaching, course structures, union issues, battles with academic bureaucrats and state bodies. Also, it involves a struggle to argue for the relevance of theoretical discourse to political analysis, outside the boundaries of academia.

The question of the presence of men was raised at the beginning of the week and held in abeyance — but not resolved — by the formation of a women-only discussion group. The issue erupted again in the plenary session. The question of language on the other hand, was constantly at issue. So it could appear that one was a theoretical issue, the other an organisational/political one. The plenary refused such schematisation. It is possible to read the concern with language as a struggle to articulate the problem of sexual difference. The question of feminist practice as variously defined through autonomy, separatism, specificity is implicated in this problem. Some argued for the presence of men

because they saw a need to break with feminist marginalisation, others that, since the issue of sexual difference raises the question of femininity for men as well as for women, it is essential for social transformation that men confront the problems. Arguments against the presence of men invoked basic feminist tenets but also more complex attitudes. There were feelings that the presence of men was oppressive because they suppressed the female voice. This cannot be discounted for it is at the crux of the problem of building a new language and points to the structuring of sexual difference not simply by the textual, but also the social. The men who were there found themselves in the double-bind familiar to women, especially those working in left groups — to speak was a risk, to remain silent might suggest they were voyeurs or passive consumers of knowledge rather than participants.

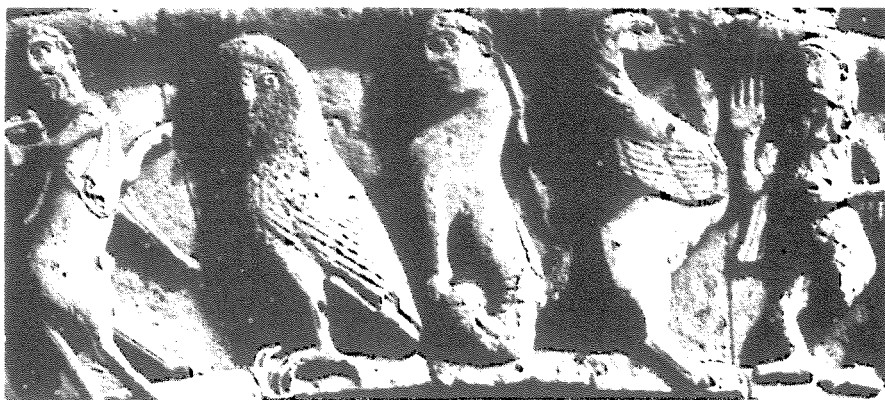
The presence of men in itself was not a problem — what is more pertinent here was the way in which their presence was posed, or other issues were displaced onto this area. The formulation of the women-only group in response to the presence of men exemplified this. This group was singled out as 'different' and positioned as 'separatists' apparently a political judgement but in fact invoking, I think, a certain moralism and defensiveness in which unconscious fears were spoken. Someone pointed out that the women-only group had been positioned as the 'other', as the unspeakable. Separatists would not have come to or stayed at the event, so what produced this ripple of paranoia? Could it be

symptomatic of the very crisis of sexual difference? Substitute 'lesbian' for 'separatist' and the whole issue becomes more complicated but also clearer. It is curious in so much discussion of heterogeneity, and of the heterogeneity of sexuality, that an imperative is instituted which advocates heterogeneity in terms of men and women working together whilst it simultaneously secures sexual difference and is threatened by the subversion of a 'difference' that challenges social categories. The audience at Edinburgh constituted in itself the dilemma of sexual difference, not simply as a conceptual category but as a social and political question.

Obviously there are a number of contradictory positions being taken up and explored here — the element of surprise, of unfamiliarity in the activity of positioning and repositioning and what is spoken is a crisis in the relation of feminism to the women's movement — the way in which that crisis was spoken at Edinburgh represents an eruption, a movement, a rethinking. In many respects it is specific to Britain and it is a pity that there was not space to explore the way in which the relation between feminism and cinema is being articulated in other countries. But that question remains and the problematisation of 'feminism' within the context of the cinema has repercussions for the way we think the cinema in terms of pleasure and politics. The excitement of Edinburgh was in the way differences were articulated as a series of continuing and overlapping exchanges, a reworking rather than a settlement.

enclitic 4

JACQUES DERRIDA *The Retreat of Metaphor*
 MARIE CLAIRE ROPARS *The Overture of October* | STEVEN UNGAR
Doing and Not Doing Things With Barthes | WILLIAM WEST *Staying*
Alive: Poe's "William Wilson" | PATRICIA FEDKIW *A Letter-al*
Re-recovery

**enclitic 5**

MAURICE BLANCHOT *From The Infinite Con-*
versation | MARIE CLAIRE ROPARS *The Overture of October* II
 HUBERT DAMISCH *Eight Theses For (or Against?) a Semiology of*
Painting | CHRISTINE RICHARDSON *All the Memory of a World: A*
Retrospective | ROBERT BURGOYNE *Oneiric Fantasy in Open City*
 LEE HUMPHRIES *Tonality, Mortality* | MEG MORLEY *Vision and*
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enclitic

PAUL KERR

EDINBURGH

TELEVISION FESTIVAL 1979

In his article on the second Edinburgh International Television Festival (*Screen* Winter 1977/78, vol 18 no 4) John Caughie argued that any future SEFT intervention should not be thought simply as oppositional, intervening in a monolithic institution — or even a monolithic festival'. The SEFT Television group's intervention at the Edinburgh Television Festival ('Television in the Eighties') this year took the form of a session on television's 'construction' of a consensus audience, supplemented by a few contributions from the floor. It is ironic, therefore, in the light of the subject that the Television group chose to discuss, that Caughie's warning should need to be repeated. In fact, almost everyone at Edinburgh this year seems to have been suffering from some kind of 'monolithism'; the entire event could perhaps be seen as the collision of (at least) two equally inaccessible institutional monoliths. Thus, the Television group was all too often equated with SEFT as a whole, with the BFI, the universities, marxism, and academicism. Similarly, many of us tended to identify individual 'practitioners' — a monolithic concept if ever there was one — with ITV companies, the IBA, show-business, capitalism, and philistinism. Having said all this I should admit my own involvement in the Television group and in the drafting of its paper. But the Television group is not simply the television arm of SEFT, let alone of *Screen*, and very real differences

of emphasis as well as of analysis do exist. In much the same way, the Edinburgh Television Festival is not the voice of or even a ventriloquist's dummy for British television — the Festival's delegates, for instance, are drawn largely from people in the so-called 'creative' grades of the larger ITV companies.

The aim of this article is not simply to rehearse a radical 'critique of the festival', for that is all too easy and has been adequately done elsewhere, but also and perhaps more urgently, to attempt, as John Caughie did in 1977, 'an autocritique of the opposition', for it would not be difficult for any of us in the Television group to criticise at least some of the things we did and said both individually and collectively. What follows is a tentative analysis of three concepts — institution, independence, and intervention — which have provided the key to many of the debates to which the group has contributed but which remain precariously unspecified in SEFT's television project both in Edinburgh and elsewhere.

Edinburgh's annual extravaganza of speeches and screenings has begun to assume a number of the characteristics usually associated with television itself, including its own running gags, ritual encounters, recurring characters and situations as well as a rigid schedule. To the cynics, therefore, this year's Festival was simply the fourth episode — third if you prefer to think of the 1976 event as a sort of 'pilot' — of what is

already established as an infinitely reproducible series. The particular complexion of this year's Festival was thus, in the words used by Jeremy Isaacs to describe the proposed Fourth Channel, 'different but not all that different'. And, it should be noted, in spite of last year's debate on television's representation of women and blacks, the speakers on the platform this year were almost all white and male. Last year's televising of the Festival had a marked effect on it: individual performances were groomed for the camera, contributions from the floor recited rather than spoken, and almost overnight an increase in repartee resulted in a corresponding diminution of discussion. This year the ITV dispute spared us a repeat of that but the Television Festival remains extremely image-conscious as a number of commentators have noticed; Simon Perry, in *Variety* (12 September 1979) for instance:

the convention's real importance lies not in the subjects under discussion, but in the political jockeying for which the debates are just so much grist to ambitious mills.

Clearly there were real and important debates at this year's Festival, but Perry has caught something of the pervasively anti-intellectual atmosphere into which SEFT's Television group had decided to intervene. However, this was by no means a sufficient explanation for the hostility with which that intervention was received. At the outset, therefore, it is important to insist that SEFT too might have been more voluble about its own political ambitions and, in the light of its paper, somewhat subtler in the handling of its audiences.

This year the SEFT Television group found itself for the first time with a place on the official agenda, four delegates on the platform and a collective paper published in the programme. This promotion, of course, was at best a very

mixed blessing. Wrongly billed as-a BFI rather than a SEFT session it was predictably shunted out of Festival prime-time and scheduled against the screenings of an Isaacs retrospective and an amalgam of 1959 episodes of *Andy Pandy* and *The Army Game*. Press coverage was decidedly better than on previous occasions, with the relatively reliable sympathies of *Time Out* (6 September 1979), *Broadcast* (10 September 1979) and, to a lesser extent, the *Morning Star* (1 September 1979) supplemented by articles in the *Observer* (2 September 1979) and even, oddly enough, the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (7 September 1979) which devoted its half-page report of the Festival entirely to an endorsement of the group's Edinburgh argument. Sympathetic treatment by the Swiss press, however, hardly amounts to evidence of the success of the group's specifically national intervention.

The 1979 Television Festival was a parcel of papers and presentations loosely wrapped around the current negotiations for the Fourth Channel (and the re-allocation of the independent television franchises) and primarily concerned its institutional structures. There were, of course, additional discussions of such Festival faithfuls as 'industrial relations' but the combined effect of delicate negotiations at the commercial television companies and the imminence of decisions about the Fourth Channel meant that 'TV4' policy almost inevitably took precedence. Predictably, however, individual sessions flowed into one another with the result, for instance, that those who either supported or saw no way of stopping the introduction of new cable and satellite technology argued convincingly that any short-term fuss over the Fourth Channel would rapidly be swamped in the rush for — and from — the fortieth. Similarly, the absence of ACTT and other union negotiators in London did nothing to prevent, indeed actively encouraged all kinds of

unsubstantiated assertions about the economic and employment structures likely to accompany the new channel. Union voices might also have helped to clarify the confusions caused by very individual inflexions of the terms 'independent' and 'freelance', and by the evasion of that crucial question, independence from what?, to go largely unasked. An article in *Time Out* (24 August 1979) however, made a useful attempt at distinguishing between economic, ideological — including 'cultural' — and political independence and one area in which SEFT can productively intervene in present negotiations is in the adumbration of the at best very 'relative' autonomy that the new channel can hope to have from the advertisers, the IBA (with its as yet unchanged Parliamentary restraints), the multi-nationals, the controlling interests of the other mass media, and the commercial television companies themselves. The Television group's paper, in spite of its careful specification of one originating institution, London Weekend Television, in its discussion of *Bruce's Big Night* failed to emphasise the fact that another of the series it cited, *Telford's Change*, was (for all the orthodoxy of its style and subject matter) actually an 'independent' production from Astramead. The reluctance of left media groups in general to differentiate between concrete conjunctures and institutions and their tendency to simply identify them in the abstract has prevented the production of more than the most cursory analysis of the industry and, almost by default, returned attention to the text (see Caughie's remarks (op cit, p 93), on Althusser, whose slippage between 'institution' and 'apparatus' and primarily philosophical categories have often been unproblematically accommodated and 'sociologised', not least by SEFT itself). Thus, for example, any critique of television is all too often a critique of 'the institution', rather than of institutions, and this obstructs the

formulation of criticisms of present practice as well as recommendations for future policy. It is this failure which *Broadcast* has identified as characteristic of too many of the opponents of ITV2, the failure of left groups in the media to have 'fastened on to tactical detail and operational planning rather than the high cool strata of principle and idealism'. In much the same vein, the *Morning Star* regretted the fact that

any practical proposals — for audience research in greater depth, for greater access and participation by viewers, for a more scientific analysis of the relationship between viewers and the programmes they watch — were lost in the spirit of mutual antagonism.

Certainly, in terms of the central thrust of the Festival and the wider Channel 4 debate the Television group's paper might well (with hindsight) have included some recommendations for the future, perhaps along the lines laid down by the IFA or the Channel 4 Group. Since Edinburgh these connections have been better made and continue to be built on.

Jeremy Isaacs' (ex-Thames Director of Programmes, now freelance) lecture, which officially opened the Festival, was described by one BBC executive as 'a fine radical speech advocating more of the status quo', which indicates the kind of forum in which the group was operating. Isaacs split his speech in three sections, devoting the first to a qualified hymn to the mutual restraint of the IBA and the Independent Television Companies' Association, the second to a passionate plea for an increased BBC licence fee and the last to an outline of his vision of the new channel. Describing the duopoly as two very different monopolies, the one of advertising revenue, the other of the licence fee, Isaacs argued that only ITV2 and a revitalised BBC could restore the ecological balance that maintains British broadcasting's reputation as the best in the world. Isaacs' view was that 15% of

airtime would go to 'independents' (once again undefined), and that the rest would be divided between the fifteen franchise holding companies with an emphasis on the big five — LWT, ATV, Granada, Yorkshire and Thames. The most voluble and visible opposition to these proposals came, not surprisingly, from the independents themselves, from the Independent Film-makers' Association as well as from the Channel Four Group. The Channel Four Group argued that no less than 50% of TV4's airtime should be allocated to independents entirely outside the influence of the duopoly, but, like the IBA, they remained silent as to how the airtime would be divided between the widely disparate independents. Isaacs concluded his lecture by repeating his warning that Open Broadcasting Authority diehards were wasting their time.

If Isaacs almost succeeded in pleasing everybody except the independents, John Birt (Controller of Features and Current Affairs at London Weekend Television) in an address on 'Freedom And The Broadcaster' attempted to get away with even more by reiterating the case against consensus programming which SEFT had laboured to elaborate earlier in the week in a much less sympathetic gathering. Birt combined this relatively radical argument, however, with a call for the complete deregulation of British broadcasting putting touching faith in the 'British capacity for peaceful change' and in the benefits of pluralism. Birt's argument, in a nutshell, was that 'the only [*sic*] constraints on the producer transmitting via cable would be financial' and so 'the authorities could be disbanded'. This utopian view, to some

extent, was undermined by the debate which took place around Rod Allen's account of the way in which the duopoly will be shaken by the development of optic fibre cable and other new technologies which will be able to transmit television programmes directly to the domestic receiver, and which are, of course, already in the hands of the multi-nationals.

There are lessons for SEFT to learn in Edinburgh, some of which are essentially strategic and it would be a pity if they are ignored. If we seriously expect to have any sort of dialogue with professional broadcasters then we must be as willing to compromise both linguistically and politically — at least in the short term — as we expect them to be. The existence of the Channel Four Group and the idea of a Television conference outside (but not instead of) Edinburgh, which has been on the Society's agenda for some time, now both offer possible spheres for future work. John Ellis, in a recent discussion document, argued that

The possibility now exists of making major intervention with the film and television industries themselves, to articulate strong and coherent criticisms and alternatives which could provide a rallying post for the left working in the disparate areas of those industries both as producers and 'consumers'.

Allen's call in Edinburgh for contributions to a radical national telecommunications policy is an indication of the kind of rallying post Ellis might have had in mind and of the kind of intervention to which SEFT can still usefully contribute.

JOHN WYVER

THE DEBATE

ON TV 4

In the early months of 1980 the Government's plans for Britain's fourth television channel will be debated in Parliament. For nearly a decade a wider debate has been conducted intensely within the television institutions, a debate centred around the clash of commercial interests and those dedicated to widely disparate forms of public service broadcasting.

This debate is currently the most important struggle within the institution of television, and continues to be argued at the economic, political and ideological levels, and holds the potential, at least, of a structure which would far more easily than the present institution allow the development of radical television work.

The initial request in 1971 by the Independent Television Companies Association (the organisation which represents the ITV franchise holders) for control of the fourth channel is recognised as the start of that debate. At that time the organised and vocal TV4 lobby prevented the Independent Television Authority (later to become the Independent Broadcasting Authority) from handing it to the ITCA and discussion continued until the appointment of the

Annan Committee. In its 1977 report that body recommended the establishment of an Open Broadcasting Authority to run the fourth channel and 'to operate as a publisher of programme material provided by others'.

The last Labour government accepted these proposals, but in May 1979 the Tories revoked them and gave the IBA responsibility 'subject to strict safeguards' for the fourth channel. Those 'strict safeguards' were elaborated by the Home Secretary William Whitelaw in a speech to the Royal Television Society in September 1979; six weeks later the IBA published its proposals in response to that speech. In the absence of the proposed Government legislation (expected in late December 1979), the RTS speech and the IBA proposals remain the key documents in the present discussion.

The Home Secretary's instructions to the IBA were summed up in the following paragraph of his speech:

The IBA will be expected to develop a distinctive service on the fourth channel, subject to similar general statutory provisions as now exist on programme content . . . in a way which is designed

to give new opportunities to creative people in British television and to add different and greater satisfactions to those now available to the viewer. It will be expected to extend the range of programmes now available to the public, to find new ways of serving minority and specialised audiences and to give due place to innovation . . . It will be expected to make arrangements for the largest practicable proportion of programmes on the fourth channel to be supplied by organisations and persons other than the companies contracted to provide programmes on ITV1.

No specific guarantees were given in the speech, nor were detailed proposals made. These lacks led to it being greeted as a promise of all things to all people. But it seems clear that, beneath the vague rhetoric, there was a genuine commitment to a different channel. 'I start from the position,' the Home Secretary said, 'that what we are looking for is a fourth channel offering a distinctive service of its own.'

The sole justification for a fourth channel has always been the necessity for a different channel. As the Independent Film-makers Association says in its pamphlet 'Channel 4 and Independence' (undoubtedly one of the most important contributions to the debate):

The case for a fourth channel has always been the case for a different channel, for a different approach to both scheduling and programme making. It is based positively on the need for diversity and innovation and negatively on a recognition and critique of the inadequacies of the current three channels.

Remarkably, the Home Secretary would seem to be in broad agreement with the IFA on this central point.

Not so the IBA; as Phillip Whitehead, MP said recently, 'What we've got in the Authority's proposals is ITV2 by the back door.' The Authority intends to establish

a non-profit making company to run the fourth channel, overseen by a board with a chair-person and deputy together with eleven non-executive members. While these board members would not be delegates, they would 'broadly represent those who are likely to provide programmes for the service.' Four board members, however, would come from the present ITV companies and would almost certainly be able to dominate in discussion and decision-making.

Answerable to the board (themselves answerable to and dismissable by the IBA) would be a programme controller, buying and scheduling programmes for the service. He or she would take programmes from the ITV companies and from a wide range of independent producers. 'The overriding concern of the programme controller will be the quality of the programmes,' say the IBA, 'and there should be no quotas, or rights to contribute for anyone. However with that prime qualification, a possible pattern at the start would be that between 15 and 35 per cent would come from independent producers, with between 25 and 40 per cent coming from the major ITV contractors, a further 10 to 20 per cent from the regional ITV contractors, up to 15 per cent from ITN, and 5 to 14 per cent from foreign sources.' So, up to 75 per cent from present ITV sources; essentially ITV2.

The IBA proposes a subscription to finance the channel, taken from the companies' gross profits before the Treasury extracts its levy and taxes. The proposed budget for the first year of operation (in 1979 terms) is £60-80 million, while a reliable independent survey estimates that some £45 million extra advertising revenue will be raised. Thus upwards of £15 million will be taken from the companies' gross profits, profits which will include the revenue from selling all the advertising time on the channel. Some part of this sum will then be recouped by the companies selling their productions to the channel.

The IBA proposals contain no specific guarantees about the price to be paid for programmes by the channel. What they do say is that 'the price eventually agreed would need to provide a continuing incentive to independent producers and to ITV companies to supply programmes'. But as the Channel Four Group (an organised lobby representing a wide range of independent producers) point out:

If the channel is not able to provide 100 per cent finance in the majority of cases — 'the fair negotiated market price' the Home Secretary talked of — many small independent producers will not be able to supply programmes and the channel will not longer be 'distinctive' and 'innovative'.

Those 'independents' with large, multinational companies will undoubtedly find projects easier to finance than the smaller, more genuinely independent companies if 100 per cent finance is not enshrined for at least part of the channel's output. So again, without a commitment to 100 per cent financing, the inevitable result will be the predomination of programmes from the ITV companies (where costs can be offset against ITV1 overheads), from the less innovative independents and from those backed by international co-production deals (costs recouped from foreign sales, with attention inevitably diverted from the British cultural context).

What the financial background points up sharply is the wide variety of companies operating under the label 'independent'. In its broadest (and least useful) sense, this means simply an individual, group or company operating outside the direct control of the BBC or the ITV contractors. The definition is essentially economic and refers to an enormous range of degrees of such independence. Most often this economic independence is exploited only for simple financial advantage to the 'independent' involved. On occasions it has, however, been used to guarantee a degree of

political independence from the statutory constraints of the BBC and ITV. Such political independence is one of the main hopes for the fourth channel, though given the Home Secretary's instruction that it must be 'subject to similar general statutory provisions as now exist on programme content', this may be a false hope. On the subject, the IBA have this to say (after quoting the Home Secretary's remark quoted above):

We believe it possible, however, that the availability of a wider choice of programmes will allow controlled encouragement (my emphasis) to be given to the presentation of a wider range of opinions and assumptions.

Given the way in which programme forms structure and determine television, however, such economic and political independence means little if it is not associated with ideological or cultural independence. Such independence is founded on opposition to the orthodoxies of television; it is an independence of the styles and forms, the methods and operations, and the assumptions of television as it operates now.

It is from a position founded on this notion that the IFA states its attitude to the fourth channel:

We are interested in achieving a different approach to scheduling, to programme making and selection and, most important of all, to the audience. It is on this basis that we believe in the need for a fourth channel, not as a new Golconda for the ITCA companies or indeed others working with broadly similar assumptions and intentions, but as one step towards a more diversified media system with greater access and a greater range of programmes commissioned, purchased and transmitted.

The IFA identify six areas in which cultural independence is important: programme range, type and content;

scheduling; production methods; language of images; technology; and the audience.

Such a notion of independence is recognised and understood by only a very few groups currently involved in the fourth channel debate. But most groups outside the ITCA are working with a relative notion of independence and it is important for SEFT to co-operate with these organisations. As Paul Kerr notes elsewhere in this issue of *Screen*:

One area where SEFT can productively intervene in present negotiations is in the adumbration of the at best very 'relative' autonomy that the new channel can hope to have from the advertisers, the IBA (with its as yet unchanged Parliamentary restraints), the multi-nationals, the controlling interests of the other mass media and the commercial television companies themselves.

That relative autonomy or independence is important. But SEFT's previous contributions to television debates (eg the response to Annan, *Screen Education* 24, Autumn 1977) have been marked by an extreme negative attitude to an institution conceived as a monolith. That attitude should not prevail here. There is the possibility of relative independence in the fourth channel and SEFT should work with these organisations (eg the IFA and the Channel Four Group) who are attempting to promote that, while recognising all the constraints imposed by the most optimistically conceived structure within the IBA.

It is argued that Channel Four will simply develop as a kind of 'safety valve' mechanism, siphoning off the radical impulses within television and channelling them into the address of a tiny audience, thus leaving the mass influence of television unchanged. It is far from certain that that will happen; it should be recognised as a possibility but opposed along with the IBA's proposals.

The TV4 structure offered by the Home Secretary may provide only minimum

conditions for cultural independence in television work. But those conditions need to be argued, lobbied and struggled for. Without them, not only will the possibility of cultural independence be lost, but also the whole 'eco-system' of British broadcasting will suffer, making any radical television work all but impossible.

The IBA's ITV2 will be expected, along with ITV1, to gather some 60-65 per cent of the audience. But Alasdair Milne, Managing Director of BBC TV, is on record as saying:

We could not maintain our place in British broadcasting on a 60-40 split. It would make it increasingly difficult, politically, to maintain the licence fee system, and the evidence of other public service systems, like CBC in Canada, or ABC in Australia, is that we would be pushed inexorably downwards.

Thus under the IBA's system an all-out ratings war is inevitable. The consequences are all but unthinkable.

Thus the creation of a broad front of opposition to the IBA's proposals is a major priority. During 1980, and before the fourth channel structure is finalised, the IBA has to go through a process of public consultation about the new ITV franchises, to be awarded in December 1980. This process will involve many public meetings after the franchise applications (due in by the end of April 1980) and clearly affects the fourth channel in crucial ways. Consequently all the opportunities afforded by the process should be exploited to articulate opposition to the IBA's proposals. SEFT is well equipped and placed to play a central role in that articulation; it should undoubtedly do so.

The IFA pamphlet 'Channel 4 and Independence' is available from the IFA, 12-13 Little Newport Street, London WC2, the Channel 4 Group are at 17 Great Pulteney Street, London W1.

KEVIN ROCKETT

IRISH CINEMA

NOTES ON SOME NATIONALIST FICTIONS

It is difficult to write from within the Irish social formation for an audience which has had little opportunity to understand the complex contradictions within Irish society. While there is a wealth of theoretical work which would help clarify many problems of Irish film history, this has been produced from outside, from very different conjunctures. Initially I thought it would be possible to explain what is meant by Irish cinema in the context of Irish history in general. Because the basic empirical, archaeological work has not been done, it is not possible to say whether the ideological notion of an Irish cinema has a historical basis. These notes are an attempt to present part of the context for such work.

My strategy will be to take three films which will put in context the most consistent theme within Irish films, that of the reconstruction of Irish history. In every period when films have been made, the most emotive and powerful narratives have been produced in the process of construction of a history. I will attempt to situate *Guests of the Nation* (1934/35), *The Dawn* (1936) and *Caoineadh Airt Uí Laoire*, (*Lament for Art O'Leary*) (1974) in the general context of Irish Cinema and the specific conjunctures within which they were made, and will briefly outline the

forms of historical discourse within which a project of this nature needs to be situated.

Irish historiography falls within three formulations, those of 'green' nationalism, bourgeois/radical revisionism and the search for a revolutionary theory.

Nationalist history was the dominant history in Ireland until the 1960s. Nationalist discourse dominated all discussion from social conservatives to radical leftists. This, coupled with a conservative Catholic ideology, has excluded or restricted other discourses: around sexuality, interpersonal relationships, divorce, contraception, abortion, capital/labour conflicts. Since 1958, when the internationalisation of the Irish economy began, nationalist and Catholic discourses have begun to lose some of their exclusive power.

The central tenet of green nationalism is the 'National Question', that the problems of Ireland can never be solved until a 32 County Republic is established, and this will only begin to be resolved once the British Government decides that it will withdraw from the North. According to this position the predominantly proletarian Protestants/Unionists, (Orange Nationalists), who have consistently opposed the unification of

Ireland, will begin to be less intransigent. Variations of this green nationalist position exist throughout the political spectrum from *Fianna Fáil* through the Provisionals and the various Trotskyist groups which give 'critical support' to the Provisionals. A recent survey published in Ireland showed that the majority of the Irish people supported a United Ireland irrespective of what the Unionist population thought about the matter.

Bourgeois revisionist history was firmly established by 1965. It countered the emotive symbols of green nationalism with empirical work on the organisation of trade and agriculture. The writings of economic historian Louis Cullen are an important example of this. The radical revisionist historians have taken this work further through more detailed investigation of the peasant/tenant farmer divide, for example. The result of this empiricism has been to undermine the

1 Though the Film Company of Ireland was one of the most prolific film-making companies in the early period. In 1916-20 they released more films in Ireland than every other company or film-maker combined. In early 1916 it made a series of one or two reel comedies and historical dramas. These were destroyed in the Easter Rising. The films were reshot that summer and released to general critical praise. In 1917-20 it made a number of feature length films including the adaption of the Nineteenth century novel *Knocknagow* by Charles Kickham, a landlord/peasant drama *When Love Came to Gavin Burke*, and *Willy Riley and the Coleen Bawn* which will be included in the Irish Cinema season at the NFT.

2 The first Ardmore films were co-productions between the co-founder of Ardmore, Emmet Dalton and RKO Television. The first films from Ardmore with the Abbey Players were *Home is the Hero* by Walter Macken, *Sally's Irish Rogue* from the play *The New Gosson* by George Shiels *This Other Eden* from the play by Louis D'Alton and *Professor Tim* from the play by George Shiels.

myths of green nationalism. The most significant shift has been in understanding the class structure of nineteenth century agriculture. Recent work is showing that in the post-Famine period it was the tenant farmers (the Irish *gombeen* or middlemen) who most directly oppressed the peasants. It was mainly this class which became landowners in the 'peasant' proprietorship of the 1880s. That same class has continued green nationalism within *Fianna Fáil* and is the ideological antecedent of the Provisionals. The belief of the nationalist historians in the effectiveness of the Cromwellian plantations, formulated in the emotive Cromwellian slogan 'To Hell or to Connaught' has been debunked. The radical historians have shown that even fifty years after the plantation, Connaught was still underpopulated. It was in the supposedly rich Eastern counties of Leinster where the most oppressive conditions existed, where starvation and famine were commonplace, and not, at that time, in Connaught.

The three films discussed will, hopefully, allow more serious attention to be given to this often grossly simplified history. History in Ireland, and the representations of that history, is politically and culturally a much more sensitive and crucial area of debate than is often the case in England, where discussions of history are often relegated to academia. Some of the significance of the challenge currently being handed out by radical historians to the myths of nationalist history will be apparent from the seminars, 'The future of a different past', to be held at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London in February/March 1980.

'GUESTS OF THE NATION' was made by Denis Johnston, a playwright associated with the Michael MacLiammoir and Hilton Edwards Gate Theatre Company. It was based on a short story of the same name by one of the young realist writers, Frank O'Connor. The story concerns the relationship between two British soldiers

who are captured by the IRA in 1921. The IRA hope to trade the soldiers for two of their own men who are about to be executed. The soldiers develop a close emotional relationship with their captors with the result that, when the British authorities refuse to bargain and then execute the IRA men, the IRA captors reluctantly carry out their duty.

This forty minute silent film was made in 1934-35. The story is a typical example of the short story realist works which have dominated post-independence Irish literature. The literary context of the film is reflected also in the production's use of the Gate and Abbey Players. The association with the Gate and Abbey wasn't surprising. In fact it would have been expected. Since earliest Irish film productions, association with the Abbey theatre was seen as not only desirable but essential. The first Irish film magazine, *Irish Limelight*, praised the Abbey Players' involvement in the first productions of the Film Company of Ireland,¹ for the work of 'carrying a knowledge of the true Ireland to other peoples'. The Abbey was internationally known and identified with Irish literary and dramatic culture, not least through association with Yeats and Lady Gregory. The acting style was also cited as the central reason why the Abbey was the obvious place for film-makers to choose their players:

the initial success of the Abbey Players as cinema artistes was due to the fact that the Abbey school always insisted upon striving after natural characterisation. Consequently they were more adapted for cinema than most artistes.

This view of the Abbey has continued to permeate Irish film-making. When Ardmore Studios was established near Dublin in 1958, the first films were adaptations of Abbey plays.² Abbey actors were put under contract and professional screen writers were brought in to adapt the plays. Ardmore management saw

themselves as building an Irish film industry on the Abbey Theatre's history on the lines of Yeats and Lady Gregory.

The production of *Guests of the Nation* was artisanal in nature: because of the unavailability of lights, the interiors were actually shot in a set built in a Dublin back garden. The film was shot over a period of two years, using uniforms and equipment supplied by the Minister for Defence in the *Fianna Fáil* Government of the day. It was premiered at the Gate Theatre in January 1936. Amongst the attendance was the Minister for Defence, Frank Aiken (Aiken had fought in the War of Independence and later became Minister for Foreign Affairs and deputy Leader of the Party). *Fianna Fáil*, sub-titled The Republican Party, was the anti-Treaty Parliamentary party which entered the *Dail* in 1927 and took power in 1931 with de Valera as Prime Minister. Though rejecting the violence of the IRA in achieving a United Ireland, it released the republican prisoners, who had been kept in jail by the pro-Treaty forces, immediately it took office. *Fianna Fáil* gradually incorporated many IRA members into the party through its 'Verbal Republicanism' (as one commentator recently characterised *Fianna Fáil*'s Northern Ireland policy). *Guests of the Nation* subsumes the contradictory *Fianna Fáil* policy into emotion: the tragedy of the War of Independence, especially of the ordinary soldiers' common interests and desires.

The national press reviews were very complimentary:

It held them as few films of modern days would have been able to hold them; It is remarkable for first class photography, remarkably capable direction and very judicious cutting; A remarkably good piece of work; Heartiest congratulations.

Frank O'Connor was also loud in his praise:

I am surprised at the result of the work of this enterprising company. In its own way, it is as fine as anything produced by the Russian producers, and I think that the Government would be well advised to provide the necessary money to have the picture refilmed. It would add to the prestige of the Irish abroad, as showing the great spirit of the War of Independence and the spirit of comradeship that existed between the opposing forces, as well as the devotion to duty of the men who fought.

While continuing his favourable comments on the film, he said that:

The film tells the story better than literature could ever draw it. It is a piece of film work that Ireland can really be proud of.

'THE DAWN' was released about six months later. It is a ninety minutes sound film made in Kerry. The film is set in 1919-20, when the Black and Tan War, the most repressive period of the War of Independence, was being fought. A short prologue is set in 1866; when the Malone family's integrity in the nationalist cause is under suspicion because one of its members is supposed to have informed on the secret organisation, the Irish Republican Brotherhood. In the film proper, Dan O'Donovan, is an IRA leader whose sister Eileen is engaged to Brian Malone, also in the IRA. Brian's elder brother, Billy, wants him to leave the IRA. Eventually Brian is expelled, partly because of his brother's pro-British sympathies, and partly because of the memory of this taint. In revenge Brian joins the Royal Irish Constabulary (this is at the period when the Black and Tans were being first drafted in), and Brian has to join a raid on his girlfriend's parents house. When he hears of a police move to catch the IRA column, the conflict set up in him by the raid and the crudity of the Black and Tans causes him to warn

the IRA and desert the RIC. He takes part in the ambush in which his brother Billy is revealed as the brains behind the IRA intelligence service. The final sequence, which shows the IRA men going in the dawn to erect a cross for a dead comrade, is a call for 'the struggle to continue'.

The production was organised and directed by garage owner, Tom Cooper, who also plays the role of Dan O'Donovan. The clothes and equipment were authentic and the ambush was a reconstruction from remembered experience — many of the participants in the film fought in the War. These elements gave it a contemporary significance which were a felt absence in the discussions of *Guests of the Nation*. When War of Independence veterans were calling for 'the struggle to continue', they were not ignored.

The range of reviews in the press varied from the ecstatic (with strong green nationalist overtones) mixed with surprise and pride in the first Irish-produced sound feature; to the hostile reaction to how the State was presented:

To everybody I say: see The Dawn. I warn you that, if you are a Unionist or an ex-Unionist, it will make you squirm. The Black and Tans are too scoundrelly for words in comparison with their IRA opponents.

The same letter writer commented on the first Irish voices:

While the undisguised Kerry voices give a shock at first to the ears which are attuned to Hollywood and Twickenham, the effect after a while is not only pleasant but adds to the delightful naturalness of the whole thing. This naturalness, indeed, is the most refreshing feature of the film.

Another writer said:

It has Irish characters, Irish sentiment

and Irish speech — three powerful assets.

A West of Ireland letter writer asked

to place on record an enthusiastic appreciation of that splendid production. It is very fine in every way, but especially in the very fair impartial light it throws on the historical aspect of the fight for freedom in the Anglo-Irish war. This film should really have been officially sponsored by the Old IRA Association, since it gives a better idea of their struggle than all the literature that has piled up around those stirring days and the heroes who faced the might of the mightiest empire of all time.

The same writer went on to commend it for its

tragedy, idealism, laughs, tears and thrills. We cannot but admire the initiative, the sense of artistry and dramatic balance as well as the natural histrionic ability of the Irishmen and women who made this epic of glorious days.

'There are of course, those who taking as their criterion the Honky Tonk, Tin Pan Alley dope served up to a patient film going public by Hollywood's much married 'stars' and the wooden snobs of Elstree, will go to an Irish film prepared to find fault.

The writer continues his attack on critics (who generally had responded favourably to the film), and exhibitors who, in not screening it

are afraid they might offend anyone's delicate, imperialistic outlook. Are we not long enough suffering patiently through 'Britons never, never shall be slaves', the latest pictures of British newly made monarchs, the spread of Imperial slavery, and the nightly wagging of Union Jacks? Now we want our picture for a change.

(The British monarch and Union Jacks had been 'excised' from films since Independence. The feeling that newsreel of the new monarchs would be shown was already causing much agitation. The same occurred in 1953 when English exhibitors in Ireland refused to give an undertaking that film of the launching of the ship *Queen Elizabeth II* would not be shown. *Sinn Féin* (the Political wing of the IRA), requested Irish Transport and General Workers Union members, who achieved a closed shop in renters' offices and cinemas in 1946, not to show it.)

The Catholic press responded with a defence of the State. One described it as:

An unfortunate production: its ethical 'message' was as misguided as its technical direction.

English Dominican, Fr Valentine, wrote that, while

nothing that was said is not historically true . . . why still call for the struggle to continue?

Ireland is now free to build. We are justified in assuming that Irish hate and revenge, bereft of its traditional purpose is turning elsewhere, that there are agents at work in the country who are using the present mood of a despairing minority for their own ends. Judging from this film, I would expect to be told that Ireland today is a fit breeding ground for anti-clericism and Communism. And this chiefly . . . by what is omitted. The Dawn was made in a land possessing culture and intense faith, where men under a great leader are fashioning a society to safeguard individual freedom and the priority of the home — an experiment in the corporate state which in our day is the Christian reply to the Soviet.

Though the reference by Frank O'Connor to the formal relationship

between *Guests of the Nation* and Russian cinema of the 1920s was acceptable, because the film's political contradictions were collapsed into emotion, when the overtly nationalist *The Dawn* was compared to Pudovkin's films, the opportunity for slander was made available:

*Why seek to fan the flames of dying fate
when its purpose is gone? To my mind,
there can only be one answer that besides
being in the 'Pudovkin' manner, this film
is also in the Soviet tradition.*
(Valentine)

The Catholic Church's attack on *The Dawn* exemplifies its increasingly vitriolic statements concerning the IRA. The IRA had begun moving gradually towards a left-wing politics. As part of that shift in the 1930s the IRA supported the Republican side in the Spanish Civil War. The Church supported the Fascists through recruitment, money and general propaganda. In all about 700 Irish people went to Spain to support the Fascists; about 150 joined the International Brigade, including many leading left wing IRA members, despite the attempt by the traditional nationalist section to stop their members from going to Spain so as to begin another military campaign. It was the traditional wing which initiated the bombing campaign of the late 1930s.

'LAMENT FOR ART O'LEARY' With De Valera's becoming Prime minister in 1957, Irish economic policy became aggressively European and internationalist. In attempting to give some indication of the transformation of Irish society there is one film in particular which will help as an introduction to post-1958 Ireland: *Caoineadh Airt Uí Laoire (Lament for Art O'Leary 1974)* financed by Official Sinn Féin, now known as Sinn Féin, The Workers' Party.

The film is based on a *caoineadh* or

lament which was a popular peasant form of poetry, and expressed sorrow in a relatively spontaneous fashion, through a litany of short rhyming lines. The lament of the title was written by the wife of Art O'Leary who was killed by English soldiers in 1773. O'Leary, like tens of thousands of Irishmen in the Eighteenth Century, had left Ireland to fight in one of the Irish Battalions of the Continental armies. Unlike most of the other 'Wild Geese', O'Leary chose to return home, marry and settle down. A descendant of the Gaelic 'aristocrats' who had been finally defeated at the Battle of the Boyne (1690) and the Siege of Limerick (1691) O'Leary, unlike his ancestors, has to secure a lease from the 'squireen', Morris, something which he resents. After a confrontation with the 'upstart' O'Leary the landlord decides to invoke one of the almost defunct Penal Laws. These clauses, which aimed at repressing and dispossessing the Irish, contained the provision that an Irish person could not own a horse worth more than five pounds. When O'Leary refuses Morris £5 for the horse, he is declared an outlaw and forced to go on the run. O'Leary decides to confront his enemies. At a river he turns to taunt Morris and the English soldiers, who, after numerous attempts, finally kill him.

The film is not the straightforward narrative this summary might indicate, it intercuts dramatised historical sequences with the rehearsal of a mixed-media play about these eighteenth century events using some of the historical sequences projected in theatre space. The characters of the past and present are blurred in order to make connections between the historical events and the 1970s. The landlord is also the director of the play. Since he does not speak Irish, and the rehearsal of the play is taking place in a native Irish-speaking area, he is often excluded from understanding what is being said. This is shown to be deliberate, especially on the part

of O'Leary. In playing the lead in the play within the film as well as the film itself, what O'Leary calls 'this play-acting' tends to undermine his own character. In addition he speaks direct to camera indicating a *personal* revenge against the director or once more telling the audience that the playacting will continue. Voices reflecting class and religious positions (Anglo-Irish, 'Paisley') are constructed as if 'interviewed'. The film begins and ends with a quote from James Connolly:

Fortunately the Irish character has proven too difficult to press into respectable foreign moulds.

The film was written, directed, shot, recorded and edited in Connemara by Cinegaël, the production company of Bob Quinn, the director. Quinn had worked in RTE (*Radio Telefís Éireann*) in the 1960s but had resigned to work freelance. He moved from Dublin to Carraroe, an Irish-speaking part of Connemara, as a conscious political rejection of urban and English-speaking culture. He decided to set up an 'independent' studio. *Lament for Art O'Leary* was the first film made in the new location. Though Bob Quinn was overall in charge of the production, there was a certain amount of collective work. The Workers' Party involvement was most directly through Eamonn Smullen, a playwright, who had suggested the idea; John Arden (who plays the landlord/director) is a well known playwright, as is Margaretta D'Arcy. Collaboration continued until final editing was complete.

Association with RTE provided Bob Quinn with a training which would otherwise have been difficult to obtain in Ireland (except through the advertising/sponsored films area). RTE now employs 2,000 people and is the most important film production centre in the country. Its half million pound budget for the soon to

be transmitted *Strumpet City* is based on the historical novel of the same name by James Plunkett, about the 1913 capital/labour conflict. This will be surpassed by the £2 million budget for the adaptation of another historical novel, *The Year of the French*, about the late eighteenth century, which is to be co-produced with a US television station.

The one place where aspiring filmmakers might have been expected to have received training is the Ardmore Studios facility. But the foundation of Ardmore in 1958 was not seen as a means of developing Irish film culture but of creating employment. In 1951 the State development agency, the Industrial Development Authority (IDA) was asked by the Government to assess the feasibility of an Irish film industry. The result was the creating of the Ardmore facility in 1958 with grants from the IDA and a State investment bank. From the beginning, it was seen in the context of job creation and foreign investment.

In fact Ardmore Studios was closed to the training of Irish people as technicians and directors. The intermittent productions actually excluded Irish workers. In the 1960s Ardmore was recognised by the English Department of Trade as an English studio for purposes of Eady finance — the proviso was that English technicians had to be employed on Eady productions. Even with the establishment of the Government-controlled Irish Film Finance Corporation, (modelled on the BFFC), English technicians were employed to the complete exclusion of Irish technicians, down to and including the grade of electrician. A dispute between the Irish and English electricians' unions over the traditional film technician category of electrician led to a series of inter-union labour conflicts between 1962-64. The English union threatened to 'black' Ardmore unless their members were employed on crews working there. The electricians were the only Irish technicians who could even take

industrial action; all the rest were automatically excluded. The decline of the English film industry was, of course, the reason why the English unions applied the threat. The result, though, was that no Irish people were trained at Ardmore. The final irony is that hundreds of thousands of pounds of IFC money lost on B features which failed to get a distribution outlet on the Rank or ABC circuits, was effectively subsidising the English film industry.

1974, the year of production of *Lament for Art O'Laoire*, was also a year of transition for the Workers' Party which had been involved in the production. Gradually moving away from the green nationalism continued by the elements which formed the breakaway Provisionals in 1969, they were continuing the line of development begun in 1962 after the failure of the IRA's 1956-62 campaign. Then the discussions increasingly concerned political rather than military tactics. The attempt to define a class politics within the South and North which could transcend the sectarianism and green nationalism had become firmly established by 1974. A symbolic reflection of this was the addition of the *Workers' Party*, as a title which may remain alone without the prefix, *Sinn Féin*, the term reminiscent of green nationalism.

Lament for Art O'Leary is a unique film in that it is the first Irish film which attempted consciously to present an emotive history and relate it directly to the present; it is the first film which consciously used a range of formal strategies; it is the first major film made by a political party; it is the first fiction film predominantly in the Irish language.

The film has been widely shown and extensively discussed. The *Sunday Independent's* film critic began an article entitled 'A Movie we can be proud of' with the statement:

There's no need to despair any more about Ireland ever being able

to make movies.

He went on to state that:

Lament for Art O'Laoire is the breakthrough 1, at least, have been waiting for — the first completely native-produced movie that seems capable of holding its own with the best of the world's new cinema.

The film was seen as a counter to:

the stereotyped clichés of the American and British commercial system.

The *Irish Times* correspondent in New York wrote after its screening there that:

the film is a gem — a brilliant idea, brilliantly executed, the most original concept to come out of Ireland in a long time.

He concluded that:

here is the basis for the Irish film industry people have been talking about for fifty years.

The film has been criticised for reflecting too closely a petit-bourgeois nationalist ideology. Though the exact position in relation to the North, colonialism and language is never clearly defined, it is perhaps the result of an unclear position *vis-à-vis* those histories. The film perhaps reflects the transition within the Workers' Party, politically and culturally. Bob Quinn has made only one short experimental film since then. His 1978 film, *Poitin* is a traditional commercial film, a modern cops and robbers tale with a 'harsh' look at the West of Ireland as 'romanticised' by John Ford. The Workers' Party has made one film (*Going, going, gone* 1977) since *Lament for Art O'Leary*. It is a campaign film about the exploitation of Ireland's natural resources by foreign capital.

All of the Independent films of the 1970s, with the exception of the BFI Production Board financed *On a Paving Stone Mounted* (Thaddeus O'Sullivan, 1978) have operated within a traditional realist aesthetics. The breakthrough made by *Lament for Art O'Leary* has not been continued.

DISTRIBUTION AND EXHIBITION are not coherently organised by independent film-makers. In fact, there is little concerted attempt to make films available to a wide audience. Independent films have little chance of commercial cinema exhibition, though several of them have been shown on television. The burgeoning film society movement which has doubled its member societies each year since it began in 1977 will soon have about eighty societies. Some of these, in large provincial towns, will almost certainly become cinema clubs within a few years. Their success is such that some have had to close their membership. The film society circuit could become the alternative to the 160 screen commercial cinema network.

Little money has been made available in Ireland for independent film production. The Irish Arts Council initiated the annual Script Award in 1976 with its financing of *Poitin*. Two other awards have been made: *Exposure* and *Travellers*, which is currently in production.

Ardmore Studios was renamed the National Film Studios of Ireland in 1975, having been bought by the State two years before. The NFSI has continued with policies similar to those of the privately owned Ardmore. It has attempted to attract foreign capital for productions or co-productions and its energies have been expended in convincing the Government that this is the correct policy for the development of the Irish film culture. In 1977 it invested more than £260,000 for a 7 per cent stake in English language territories (*except* North America) in a French production, *Purple*

Taxi. Last April a season of Irish films was exhibited at the *Filmoteca Nacional de España* in both Madrid and Barcelona. The total production cost of the 17 films, shown in eight programmes, was less than the 7 per cent stake in *Purple Taxi* bought by the NFSI. This highlights the difference between the NFSI and the independents, which has yet to be fully recognised by the politicians and civil servants who have put more than £2 million into Ardmore since 1958.

What of the future? In July last, the Minister for Industry, Commerce and Energy announced that £4 million would be made available by the Government, over four years, as part of a *Film Bill* due to be passed in the present session of Parliament. That Bill should be published, if not passed, by the time this article appears. But film makers, critics and interested bystanders are wary: in 1970 a *Film Bill* was published incorporating the recommendations of the Report of the Film Industry Committee which had been set up by the Government in 1967. The Bill never reached the Second Stage in the *Dail*. The proposed legislation reportedly will include the provision for an Irish Film Board. The composition of that Board is as indeterminate as the as the scripts it is likely to support.

The fourth nationalist fiction of this article is perhaps the notion of an *Irish* film. Though independent film-makers, advertising directors and many trade unionists agree that *Irish* films (rather than the type of international co-production favoured by Ardmore/NFSI) should be supported, so far there has been little discussion of what kind of cinema should be developed.

I hope that some of the issues explored in this article will be taken forward in the seminars at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in February/March 1980 in connection with the *Sense of Ireland* event.

RICHARD KEARNEY

JOYCE ON LANGUAGE, WOMEN AND POLITICS

For too many years the work of 'Ireland's unremunerated national apostate' — James Joyce — has been monopolised by the 'Anglo-Saxon' industry of literary criticism. The most recent and most risible example of this commercialism of Letters is the New York publication last year of '99%' of Joyce's working papers in the form of sixty-three facsimile volumes selling at \$4,300 the lot. The recent sale of the letters of his wife Nora to an American university and their subsequent public exposure in print is, despite the noble defence of Richard Ellman, yet another nail in the coffin of Joyce the *writer*. For one of the major achievements of the Joyce Industry has been to reduce Joyce the writer to Joyce the man. Hence the comic paper-chase which takes place in Dublin at the end of every Anglo-Saxon university year, when hoards of treasure-hunting thesis-happy young graduates roam the streets trying to discover if Barney Kiernan's pub and Hollis St Hospital *really* exist.

This Anglo-Saxon attitude to Joyce is, quite clearly, spawned by the Leavisian criterion of 'responsive openness to life' as it is lived by 'representative human beings'. Accordingly, the Joyce Industry trades on such questions as: What was 'life' in Dublin like when Joyce was a

young man? How does a 'representative' Irishman compare with a 'representative' human being? and was Joyce himself 'representative' of humanity and 'responsive' to life? Indeed one critic goes so far as to query why one should bother to endow Joyce's work 'with meaning when all he needs is a biography'. As if Ellman's excellent and exhaustive biography was not sufficient! As if Deirdre Bair's 1979 biography of Beckett — Joyce's 'ill-starred punster' — has not, despite itself, proved the rule that it is not what a writer is or was that matters but how he/she writes! The 1978 issue of the *Crane Bag*, an indigenous Irish intellectual journal, was an attempt, though of limited success, to take Joyce seriously as a *writer*, as a forger of *language* in a specific cultural and historical context. Colin MacCabe's recent book *James Joyce and the Revolution of the Word* (1979)* is a more accomplished effort to carry out a similar task.

It is hardly an exaggeration to say that MacCabe's book represents a landmark in Joycean scholarship. Eschewing both the cultism and psychologism of the Anglo-Saxon 'Joyce industry', MacCabe brings

* Available from SEFT, price £8.95/US\$20.00 plus 50p/\$1 p&p

to bear on Joyce's texts the critical methods of continental psychoanalysis and linguistics which so preoccupied and fascinated Joyce himself during his Paris, Zurich and Trieste sojourns. Although it is doubtful that Joyce was directly familiar with the linguistic theories of Jakobson or De Saussure, he was certainly well versed in Mauthner's equally revolutionary philosophy of language. Similarly, while it is obvious for chronological reasons that Joyce never read Lacan, he was passionately interested — when still 'jung and freudened' — by the founding fathers of the whole psycho-analytic movement. The influence of earlier continental philosophies (Vico, Bruno, Hegel) on Joyce's work is evident, but it was from the pioneering modern disciplines of linguistics and psychoanalysis that Joyce felt compelled to draw in his efforts to extend the boundaries of human consciousness and, as prerequisite, human language. The revolutionary nature of this double-edged extension is to be witnessed in Joyce's innovatory attitude to language, to women and to politics.

JOYCE AND LANGUAGE Before reviewing MacCabe's linguistic approach to Joyce I wish to make some general remarks about Joyce's own attitude to language. Joyce was in entire agreement with the statement of his Paris friend and editor Eugene Jolas that 'the real metaphysical problem today is the word' (*Transition*, 1929). For Joyce language was that enigmatic medium, half-spiritual half-material, which — as *Finnegans Wake* 'retales' — first entered the world in the form of the biblical 'logos' and which subsequently fell into non-meaning with the fall of Adam and Eve and the construction of the Tower of Babel. Joyce admitted to Frank Budgen that to write or read *Finnegans Wake* was to come to understand the story of Babel.

The *Wake* is a chronicle of human babbling, a 'collideorscape' of 'semiological agglutinative' and 'comparative

accoustomology'. As such it testifies, by a play on language as *lapsus*, to the 'fallen' nature of language. Joyce's language is a lapsarian language, built on lapses of pen and tongue, of taste and sexual behaviour, and embodied in the mythic and historical figures of falling: Humpty Dumpty, Wellington, Old Tim Finnegan and, of course, Adam and Eve. Indeed Joyce reminds us that Adam was the one who invented naming by first saying 'goo to a goose' and Eve, the instigator of the fall of language, is recognised as the 'grandmere of grammaires'. But modern man, and in particular the literary critic, refuses to understand 'how his grandson's grandson, will stammer up in peruvian', nor 'dares not think why the grandmother of his grandmother's grandmother coughed Russky in suchky husky accent (which) means I once was otherwise.' The absence of inverted commas or quotation marks in the *Wake* epitomises Joyce's determination to show, in and through *writing*, that there is no homogenous individual, racial or cultural identity; that, when one speaks, several speak; that what one says is rarely what one means to say. Joyce's linguistic Tower of Babel, constructed of thunderwords and silences and 'bawling eliminium sounds' symptomises the nihilism of our decadent civilisation, the cul-de-sac of signs without signification into which our western language has been led. One of Joyce's prime targets was the modern European, confident in the illusion of his cultural and linguistic self-identity and thus ignorant of the basic truth that each society is composed of 'diversed tongued . . . antagonisms'; that the 'babbblers with their thangas vain have been (confusium hold them)'.

Accordingly, writing for Joyce became a sort of collective psychoanalysis of our 'polygutteral' culture; a 'psaokoonaaloose' as he himself puts it, which sets out to record the lapsus of univocal meaning into a medley of different and equivocal languages: 'the law of the Jungerl'. Joyce

realised that language was no transparent mirror for some transcendent ideal meaning, but rather a hybrid of non-meaning resulting from the discontinuities of human speech and writing. The *Wake* would be a human, all too human, re-creation on this chaos of 'intermis-understanding minds' and as such would belie the classic myth of the text as a mere translation or representation of some pre-existing mental message.

Finnegans Wake, therefore, constitutes a cultural inscription of the crisis of language as language, a 'realmalgamating' of linguistic 'contraries' which is irreducible to the classical realist criterion of Anglo-Saxon literary criticism: the idea that the meaning of the text is a unidimensional translation of the meaning of the mind that composed it. It is for this reason that Jung was prompted to call Joyce a 'prophet' and that the modern continental movements of linguistic psychoanalysis—represented by Sollers, Lacan, Derrida and more recently MacCabe—have been able to appreciate for the first time what Joyce is really about: the lapsus of discontinuity of meaning in and by means of language: Thus Joyce's definition of the *Wake* as 'crums of trektalk' and 'messes of mottage and quashed quotatoes' is not some disguised biographical allusion to Nora Joyce's cuisine but a comment on the cultural crisis of language *per se*.

Joyce's preoccupation with the crisis of western language was undoubtedly accentuated by the 'cultural' fact that he was an Irishman writing in English and living in Italy, Switzerland and France. Unlike many other Irish writers (eg Synge, Yeats, Lady Gregory, O'Flaherty and Flann O'Brien) who drew their literary inspiration from their native language or mythology, Joyce had no time for 'Irishness' in this linguistic/nationalist sense. But he was not prepared either to follow the success trail to London carved out by so many of his Dublin literary predecessors—in particular Wilde and Shaw.

Granted, Joyce used an English passport and the English language; but he subverted the 'imperialistic' status of both in and through his writing. Joyce did not seek exile of asylum in the lands of the language he employed—England and the United States—but increased his sense of linguistic alienation by living alternatively in three different European cities of three different tongues (Italian, French and German). If Joyce is an Irish writer it is not because he took his inspiration from the Irish language or the Irish nation, but because begotten of a colonised land without a national language or identity he chose to live out this crisis of alienation rather than returning to some lost and defunct Celtic Twilight. If Joyce was a celt it was as an alien and not as a native. He used the English language so as to deconstruct it *from the outside*.

Joyce wrote in the English language as a foreigner, as a wandering Jew (like Bloom), all too conscious of the hybrid hypocrisies and mongrel discontinuities which this language of Empire, like all Western languages, sought to hide so as to preserve the illusion of homogenous identity. Joyce's view of Ireland as his 'first and only love where Christ and Caesar go hand in glove', a 'lugly bog' or 'the sow that eats her own farrow' is amusingly illustrated in Beckett's description of his homeland in *First Love*:

What constitutes the charm of our country . . . is that all is derelict with the sole exception of history's ancient faeces. These are ardently sought after, stuffed and carried in procession. Wherever nauseated time has dropped a nice fat turd you will find our patriots, sniffing it up, on all fours, their faces on fire.

In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Joyce's hero, Stephen Daedalus, exclaims:

I will not serve that in which I no longer believe, whether it call itself home, my

fatherland or my church . . . you talk to me of nationality, language or religion. I shall try to fly by these nets.

It is in a similar vein that in *Stephen Hero* the young artist remarks indignantly to his nationalist classmate Madden:

It seems to me you do not care what banality a man expresses so long as he expresses it in Irish.

But while Joyce flew in the face of the language movement of the Gaelic League and the Celtic Revival he clearly recognised that English was not his language either, but rather the language of the invader in which the invaded could never find rest or identity. In *A Portrait* Stephen engages the Englishman who is Dean of Studies at the university in a lengthy conversation during which he articulates the following crucial discovery:

The language in which we are speaking is his before it is mine. How different are the words home, Christ, ale, master on his lips and mine! I cannot speak or write these words without unrest of spirit. His language, so familiar and so foreign, will always be for me an acquired speech. I have not made nor accepted its words. My voice holds them at bay. My soul frets in the shadow of his language.

Joyce wrote so as to undo writing, so as to render the English language self-conscious, to expose its *lack* of any univocal identity or meaning. Had he been at one with such a sense of identity, it is possible that he would have been tempted like most Anglo-Saxon writers to line up in the long tradition of English literature, to purify and perfect its dialect. - But he did not do so and could not, even if he wanted to, *without unrest of spirit*. In this linguistic sense, and this sense only, can Joyce be called an 'Irish' writer.

These were some of the cultural

reasons why Joyce as an Irish writer was able to discover writing as *writing* and thus destroy the classic illusion that it was merely the transparent representation of some prior individual or national meaning. Breaking free from the Anglo-Saxon model of literary criticism MacCabe's book is the first of its kind to recognise Joyce as a writer of *language* and to analyse this linguistic creation with the aid of modern Continental linguistic models. I will summarise here some of the major insights of such an innovatory analysis.

MacCabe argues that the notorious difficulty in reading Joyce is due to the fact that Joyce employs language so as to transform the reader from a passive consumer (the conventional approach) into an active creator, ceaselessly metamorphosing both him/herself and the language of the text. Joyce shatters the traditional belief of literary criticism that the text is an homogenous, definable object for the reader or critic to translate into a transparent paraphrase or 'intended meaning'. With the disappearance of the text as *object* goes the disappearance of the notion of the hero, author or reader as a homogenous, definable *subject*. Traditionally, the subject provided a unified field of experience and set itself up in a single position of dominance from which to assess and direct this field of experience. By refusing the subject any such privileged hegemony over experience and by refusing to allow the text to play its habitual role as a linguistic object which *represents* experience, Joyce subverted the standard canon of literary interpretation: that there is a meaningful correspondence between language and the world, sustained and guaranteed by the interpreting subject.

Joyce's texts . . . refuse the subject any dominant position from which language could be tallied with experience. Ulysses and Finnegans Wake are concerned not with representing experience through language but with experiencing language

through a destruction of representation (MacCabe, p4).

MacCabe exploits to the full here Lacan's discovery that the displacement and dispersion of the traditional subject derives from the split between the conscious and unconscious, a split is itself, ultimately, founded in *language*. MacCabe's articulation of this thesis is at times scarcely less intricate than Lacan's own; but I will try in a few words to summarise his summary. The unconscious results from the fact that, as one speaks, what one says always escapes one: the saying is irreducible to the *said*. For as the 'I' (the conscious ego) says one thing, 'it' (the unconscious id) says something else (and very often several different things). Thus the Cartesian *cogito* — I think therefore I am — which gave primacy to the 'subject' as pure and evident self-presence (thereby founding the subject's judgement of *correspondence* between language and experience) is abandoned in favour of the Lacanian-Freudian *cogito* — I think (or speak) where I am not and am where I do not think (or speak). In short, Lacan replaces the straight *cogito* of Descartes with a split *cogito* which recognises a plurality of heterogenous discourses.

According to such a psychoanalytic model, reading is no longer merely passive consumption of a self-evident signified (meaning) but an active structuring of multiple self-differentiating signifiers (ie shifting material images). Such an active structuring allows for the phenomenon of creative *desire* which, psychoanalysis has shown, only occurs when the traditional notion of the subject, or object, as a fully defined *presence* is refuted by the recognition that the reader of a text, like its author or hero, is confronted with an *absence* of meaning. Such recognition arises, in turn, from the discovery that the text itself is no single transparent meaning, but a multiplicity of differing discourses which the reader must actively

make sense of for himself.

MacCabe begins his book, accordingly, by exposing the pretention of the *classic realist text*. Classical realism, be it evinced in a Balzac or George Eliot novel, operated on the assumption that there is a given univocal 'reality' and that the narrative discourse of the text functions simply as a transparent window on this reality. Hence the claim of the realist novel is to *represent*, through its narrative, invariable and generalisable features of human nature. Such an idea of the text as a see-through narration endorsed both the structure of the story, wherein the hero progresses towards a final definition of his true nature, and the structure of a privileged *meta-language*, frequently that of the omniscient author-narrator-hero, which would situate and ultimately judge the relative validity of the various other discourses in the text (in terms of its own originating and extra-textual meta-discourse). Joyce exposed the meta-linguistic strategy of the realist text by refusing any infallible discourse which would dominate and control the others on the basis of its claim of final access to a single 'representable' reality.

Joyce refused to allow the text to determine a stereotyped reading preferring to compel his readers to actively constitute their own multiple readings.

As MacCabe says of *Dubliners*:

The text works paratactically, simply placing one event after another, with no ability to draw conclusions from this placing.

And he adds:

It is important to recognise that these are not stories 'about' Dublin in the sense that Dublin is an entity understood and referred to outside the text. Rather it is a question of the reader producing Dublin through the interaction of his own and the text's discourses. The movement of the text is not that of making clear a

reference already defined and understood; of fixing the sense of an expression. Instead the text dissolves the simple sense of Dublin as a city . . . and replaces it with the very text of paralysis . . . a vacuum that must be filled by the reader (p 29).

In this manner, Joyce deconstructed the 'innocence' of classic realism which sought to hide itself as an activity of signifying (a multiplicity of differing and contradictory signifiers) and to let emerge only some pre-established and unproblematic signified (accomplished narrative meaning). The strategy of Joyce's use of language from the *Dubliners* to *Finnegans Wake* was the denial of any privileged discourse to which the other languages of the texts could be reduced. This denial forced the reader to experience the conflicting discourses of the characters not as representation but as articulation, that is, as language itself in its differentiating structure. The truth of the text, and by extension of ourselves the readers, was no longer a question of *correspondence* but became instead a question of *creation*; a creation which, sometimes, expressed itself as play, at other times as struggle.

MacCabe argues that the struggle against representational narrative is a struggle against the principle of the father. The paternal principle is epitomised in the classical notion of the self-sufficient and self-present subject/author. *A Portrait*, *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* are, each and all, attempts to evade paternal identification and to let the desire of the woman, or mother, speak. To do away with the conventional conception of narrative ending means the acknowledgement of 'absence' and 'difference': preconditions for the *female* structure of desire and language which stand opposed to the limiting and Procrustean 'presence' of the paternal phallus. Desire and language belong to the female principle for, as Lacan sug-

gests, they presuppose the absence of, and therefore freedom from, the illusory and static sufficiency of phallic dominance. MacCabe suggests that:

It is this lack of dominance which enables us to locate the author not as a simple source who, outside the text, can identify himself and then communicate this identity through a transparent discourse but rather as the play of possibilities produced by the various discourses of the text.

In Joyce these discourses include those of nationalism and inter-nationalism; Catholicism, Judaism and Atheism; ethics, aesthetics and erotics. His task is to de-center the notion of reader and author so that both reader and writer may become aware of the constant differentiation and creation of meaning in which our language — as spoken, written or read — implicates us. Meaning is not something originating from a given reality, to be subsequently represented by language. Meaning is produced through the very activity of writing and reading: the free differentiation of variable material signs. Impotent to bring the Joycean text to a 'close', we discover that we can no longer 'close' ourselves either. We are revealed to ourselves as *language*, as continuous differentiation and dispersion into contradictory discourses, as always other and different from what we think we are, as perpetual re-creation.

JOYCE AND WOMAN In *Ulysses* Joyce pleads for a new understanding of woman which would liberate the female principle from the four stereotyped 'phallogentric' projections predominating in Ireland (and in an analogous fashion in the western world as a whole) at the turn of the century. First, the image of the mother who sacrifices all to the values of the father and demands that her son do likewise (cf Mrs Daedalus's appeal that Stephen conform to the logocentric ideals

of a catholic, nationalist, bourgeois Ireland: chs 1-3). Secondly, the image of Mother Eire as championed by such chauvinistic nationalists as Deasy or the Citizen (Cyclops episode) and challenged by the internationalist-Jewish Bloom. Thirdly, the image of the chaste and self-sacrificing Virgin (Tower of Ivory episode etc) propagated by the Irish Jansenist clergy (Nausica episode). Fourthly, the 'womans magazine' cliché of the woman as a handicapped or deformed version of the socially privileged male (cf the limping Gerty McDowell in the Nausica episode); or as a prostitute/barmaid who caters to his basic appetites (Miss Douce and Miss Kennedy in the Sirens episode, Bella Cohen in the Nighttown episode).*

In opposition to these 'mothers of memory' who deny the reality of female desire and demand of Stephen and Bloom that they play the traditionalist male role — punishing then with guilt ('agenbite of inwit') if they do not — Joyce proposed the revolutionary image of Molly Bloom. Molly incarnates the positive and subversive values of the feminine principle which have been repressed and alienated by the regime of masculine *logos*. She represents the liberation and integration of the pleasure principle, all that is unconscious, and life-promoting. She opposes the male *logos* of sterile self-definition (cf Bloom and Stephen's solipsistic discourse in the Ithaca episode) with a *mythos* of humour, desire and charity. Thus she challenges the male belief in the inevitability of linear progress (the Ulysses-Telemachus *navigatio*) out of fidelity to the circularity and materiality of the temporal order. As such, Molly provides Bloom and Stephen with the possibility of an alternative appropriation and acknowledgement of the female principle.

But such an acknowledgement is not gratuitous. Stephen and Bloom must first travel along the paths of their own erroneous and narcissistic masculinity. Though correct in their rejection of the life-destroying 'mothers of memory', Stephen and Bloom make the mistake of pursuing an 'ideal' artistic creation which would be sufficient unto itself (*causa sui*) and thus eliminate any recourse to a mediating female principle. As models they take (1) the metaphysical doctrine of the Trinity whereby the Father and the Son create through the artistic principle of the Spirit (without any mediation through a material principle); and (2) the Shakespearian doctrine in *Hamlet* that the Ghost unites Father with Son in total exclusion of female desire (Gertrude and Ophelia): in the National Library episode (ch 7) Stephen argues that Shakespeare sought to recreate himself 'by writing and reading the book of himself'; that the godlike artist compounded of father, son and ghost is 'himself his own father' — a self-creation from nothing. But the 'sufficiency' of such phallogocentric creation is belied in the Ithaca episode when the face to face encounter between artist-father Bloom and artist-son Stephen produces not creation at all but sterility: those 'dry rocks' of 'mathematical cathechism', as Joyce put it, which constitutes any exclusively male discourse.

Finally, instead of Penelope (Molly) subordinating herself to the vengeful slaughter of suitors by husband (Ulysses-Bloom) and son (Telemachus-Stephen), thus effacing herself before their reascent to power, we find Joyce reversing the original myth. Bloom and Stephen acknowledge their impotence once deprived of the mediating life-principle of Penelope-Molly (cf MacCabe, p 132). 'Ithaca is alien. Penelope has the last word' Joyce admitted to Valéry Larbaud. Any art which tries to exclude the female principle of desire cuts its own throat. Thus in the final pages of the Ithaca

* Many of the remarks in this section are borrowed from Seamus Deane, Anne Bernard and, of course, Colin MacCabe.

episode we find Stephen acknowledging the life-giving light in Molly's window and Bloom returning to the female sexuality he had misconstrued and abandoned: 'childman weary manchild in the womb'. Molly's soliloquy which terminates the novel, represents the resurrection of the Eros principle, for so long banished to the suppressed regions of the male-dominated psyche. Molly's ultimate 'yes' is an affirmation of the possibilities of reconciling the exigencies of creation and procreation.

This transition from a self-sufficient (male) consciousness to a self-differentiating (female) consciousness is, MacCabe demonstrates, attested in the *writing* itself. The very structure of Joyce's writing moves from traditional linear narration (a beginning which progresses towards the conclusion of a final self-definition of the ego and a full presence of meaning) to a new and revolutionary mode of writing: a *female* writing which blends together different self-differentiating discourses; which shatters the notion of a single psychological-narrating subject; and which circles and divides, refusing to begin or end logically or triumphally (as in Molly's soliloquy).

Similarly in *Finnegans Wake* Joyce exposes the insufficiency of Shaun's exclusive identification with the law-giving phallus and Shem's with the equally phallic, domineering pen. He moves instead toward a new liberating and more 'female' form of writing, a writing instigated and epitomised by the Joycean principle of unconscious desire: Anna Livia Plurabella. As MacCabe argues:

Through its constant demonstration of the differences and absences with which language is constituted, writing allows a constant openness to the feminine. Finnegans Wake lets the unconscious speak by investigating the very act of writing; it tells us the mother's secrets . . . it suggests that there is a totally

different attitude to language which can be characterised as female (p 147).

Joyce's term for this female writing is 'grandma's grammer' and he suggests that it is the female unconscious which will reveal this grammar to mankind. Such revelation was originally to have been Issy's task in the 'nightlessons' section. But Joyce, a man, saw the incongruity of communicating the female unconscious, albeit through his female invention, Issy; and so he abandoned the project contenting himself with a scattering of its content through the final version as 'Issy's Footnotes'. The mother's secret would for the moment have to be expressed, ironically, through the pen of Shem. The properly female communication of the female unconscious, and by extension of female writing, would have to await a future, and presumably female, writer.

However, *Finnegans Wake* does succeed in suggesting the validity of a distinction between male and female principles of consciousness, expressed in two different types of writing. While on the one hand we have the story-telling/narrating father promising male identity and definition, on the other we have the mother destroying the myth of the father's omnipotence, dividing language into its different discourses and allowing the alterity of female 'desire' to speak. The *Wake* expresses the feminine excess of any limits dictated by the male, thus exposing those limits as limits (for both man and woman). Joyce refuses to treat the male and female principles either as a dualism or as reducible the one to the other. They are legitimately *different* if by no means mutually exclusive (for the unconscious is bi-sexual). But Joyce was ahead of the conceptual movements of his time which explains the inconclusiveness of his attempt 'to sketch the central differences in the formation of the female and male unconscious'. Nevertheless as MacCabe concludes:

These differences, which find no explanation within psychoanalytic theory, are . . . essential to any explanation of the language of Finnegans Wake (p 149).

Thus Joyce hails women in *Finnegans Wake* as the 'bringers of pluralities'; he even goes so far as to suggest that it is 'an harmonial philosophy' of sexual differentiation which is expressed in and by the linguistic differentiation of the text. The *Omphalos* which Joyce promotes as the guiding principle of the *Wake* in opposition to the phallic principle of the classical text, is identified by Joyce as the very 'house of breathings (*spiritus* or *logos*) wherein 'lies the word'. The female matrix is the structure of language itself.

Joyce's recognition of the valid difference between the male and female principles of the unconscious, as well as his essential distinction between the sterile and stereotyped images of woman and the genuine liberating ones, are surely important guidelines for any future re-construction of feminist ideology. Joyce recognised that the *creative* possibilities of woman were in no real way incompatible with her potentiality to desire and regenerate (ie embrace the temporal order of differentiation and alter-ation). This is a necessary reminder in our present time when many feminists identify (wrongly) such a conception of the woman as conservative or traditionalist. Joyce put the lie to such a fallacious prejudice by recognising the revolutionary potential of such a promotion of the female unconscious for any genuine feminism. Defending Ibsen to Arthur Power he wrote:

You ignore the spirit which animated him. The purpose of the Dolls House, for instance, was the emancipation of women, which has caused the greatest revolution in our time in the most important relationship there is — that between men and women; the revolt of women against the idea that they are the mere

instruments of men.

Joyce recognised that both the revolution in writing and in society would only come through a full acknowledgement and reappropriation of the feminine principle. The revolution of the word has already begun with Joyce; the revolution of society to be effected by the re-integration of the female unconscious into both female *and* male thinking and behaviour has yet to be achieved.

JOYCE AND POLITICS Joyce's texts compel us to understand ourselves as a plurality of overlapping and contradictory discourses or practices. Such an understanding results from the discovery that the human self is irreducible to any single discourse or meaning. The traditional conception of politics, consequently, as a determinate and overruling discourse must be abandoned. Bloom, for example, threatens the nationalist discourse of the Citizen in the Cyclops episode because he cannot be identified as any *one* thing, Irishman or Jew, nationalist or internationalist. It is the very refusal to acknowledge the impossibility of identity which, MacCabe argues (p 102), produces political intolerance and violence. By de-centering the Citizen's code of representation, Bloom threatens to displace the Citizen himself as self-righteous subject.

Joyce's politics are therefore an anti-politics; or, at best, a de-centered politics. The implication being that we must recognise the plurality and differentiation of language as written discourse but also as practical discourse. All conventional idols must fall, be they literary or political. Hence Joyce's early enthusiasm for anarchic syndicalism and particularly its use of the political strike which Joyce himself used as a metaphor for his own writing:

If it is not far-fetched to say that my action, and that of men like Ibsen & c,

is a virtual intellectual strike, I would call such people as Gogarty and Yeats and Colm the blacklegs of literature. Because they have tried to substitute us, to serve the old idols at a lower rate when we refused to do so for a higher (Letter to Stanislaus, 1906).

Stephen Daedalus's determination to destroy the phallic pretensions to omnipotence of priest, king and father are, MacCabe shows, directly related to Joyce's rejection of the phallogocentric politics of Irish society, religion and nationalism. Such reactionary politics sought to reduce the Irish citizen to a stereotyped identity as 'son' or 'daughter' of an homogenous, defined and immutable Fatherland. Even Connolly the leader of the working class socialist movement in Ireland, saw no hope of political survival in Ireland if he did not subordinate the socialist cause of liberation to the nationalist cause of blood-sacrifice. Endorsing such an introverted ideology of sacrifice Connolly declared in 1916 that:

Without the slightest trace of irreverence but in all due humility and awe, we recognise that of us, as of mankind before Calvary, it may be truly said without the shedding of blood there is no redemption.

Most Irish writers have sought, in one manner or another, to critically combat the modern Irish concept of identity as bourgeois, nationalistic and bigottedly religious (catholic or protestant). One group of such authors — including Yeats, AE, Lady Gregory, Edward Martin — reacted to this cliché of nationhood by returning to its ancient mythological roots. In this way they hoped to furnish the Irish community with a spiritual alternative to the modern nationalist model; but this literary revival of an ancient celtic past served to confirm rather than criticise the emerging nation.

The resuscitated symbols of mythological 'Eire' were soon recuperated as popular idols for the new Republic: a bronze *Cuchulain* appeared in the General Post Office in Dublin and *Caitlin ní Houlihán* gazed up from the Irish pound note. (Both, we might add, thanks to Yeats' dramatic imagination).

However, another group of Irish writers opted to counter the clichéd idioms of Irish nationalism, by parodying the mythological presuppositions of such an identity rather than attempting to revise or purify them. This counter-movement includes Flann O'Brien, at times Beckett, and most significantly Joyce. Whereas the Celtic Twilight's approach to myth was, perhaps despite itself, iconic and idolatrous, this alternative approach was radically iconoclastic. For example, Joyce's development of the myth of *Finn* and the *Fianna* (who gave their name to both major political parties of the Republic: *Fianna Fáil* and *Fine Gael*, as well as to the 'Fenian' nationalist movement which preceded it) was to de-mythologise the stock mythology of the introverted nationalist cult. Rather than invoke the mythic Finn as a serviceable shibboleth for the new Republic, Joyce juxtaposes him in *Finnegans Wake* to his hod-carrying contemporary counterpart, old Tim Finnegan. Joyce's Finn is not some reified or identifiable personality, he is a protean word: at one moment Finn and then Finnegan, finish then phoenish, then phoenix/fiendish/finest park, then finisthere, finishque (gaelic: fresh water) as Finn again awake.

In short, Joyce used myth deconstructively so as to open the Irish consciousness to more creative horizons, to a dialogue with the cultures of Dante, Vico, Rabelais, Goethe, Hegel and the builders of Gothic cathedrals. Joyce was never content to cultivate *Sinn Féin* ('ourselves alone'). When he used myth at all it was as likely to be Greek (*Ulysses*) as Celtic (*Finn*) and it was

always deployed as a process of demystification and openness rather than as a product of insular exclusiveness. This is why Joyce was so impressed for a time with the socialist and inter-nationalist principles of Connolly and the Labour Movement; it is also why he so indignantly deplored their ultimate capitulation to a narrowly Irish catholic nationalism. As he confessed to Power:

Once the church is in command she will devour everything . . . and we may degenerate into the position of a second Spain.

While it is abundantly clear that Joyce was as horrified by Irish catholic nationalism as he was by the British Imperialism which preceded it, I think it is a mistake to compare Joyce's political attitude to that of Lenin as MacCabe

tends to do in the conclusion of his book. Joyce and Lenin swam in the same lake in Switzerland, but that is about as much as they ever had in common. MacCabe is closer to the mark when he states:

Joyce's writing becomes a more and more desperate attempt to deconstruct those forms of identification which had allowed the triumph of the national revolution to mean the very opposite of a liberation of Ireland . . . It may well be that art can only participate in a revolutionary politics. If such a politics does not exist then the writer is inevitably condemned to be 'apolitical', his or her political role reduced to a constant interrogation of the form of politics (p 170).

Joyce suffered just such a condemnation and, it seems, was content, for the time, with this position.

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PAUL HIRST, ELIZABETH KINGDOM

ON EDELMAN'S 'OWNERSHIP OF THE IMAGE'

Bernard Edelman's work is probably the most original contemporary Marxist writing on the theory of law. This article is intended as an introduction to that work: it consists primarily of a summary of *Le droit saisi par la photographie* (a translation of this work and his essays on Kant and Hegel has been recently published by Routledge and Kegan Paul under the title *Ownership of the Image*). Edelman attempts to produce an analysis of the specific form of law and legal categories, not by deriving it from other categories of Marxist theory (as, say, an expression of 'commodity fetishism') but by an interrogation of legal practices and the discourse of the courts. This analysis operates by selecting certain sites in law as symptomatic of its workings, problems where juridic discourse is interrupted and 'caught out' in its functioning.²

Edelman treats law as a specific social form of ideology — in Althusser's sense of a discourse/practice constituting social relations and the subjects who support them. First, law works as a discourse/practice by 'interpellating'

individuals as subjects of a particular type. Central to the categories of legal theory and to the operations of law is the *legal subject*, a being defined as capable of supporting private property relations, bourgeois individual freedoms and so on, because it is presupposed as *possessor of itself*. Second, this ideological interpellation produces certain social effects — subjects of a particular type, the 'autonomy' of the legal sphere, and these effects which make law a distinct and independent realm occludes the social functions which law performs and the conditions of its functioning.

For Edelman bourgeois legal categories have a necessary general form (they are not mere codifications of class interest or the expression of particular socio-economic conditions). This form in its practical deployment is not without contradictions and reversals, and this process is as vital to the functioning of the law as the logic of its formal categories. Law represents a specific form of 'imaginary' relation of men to their (capitalist) conditions of existence, a relation in which they are all free agents, possessors, entering into equitable contracts and exchanges one with another. But law is a *specific* form of (bourgeois) ideology, not merely one more incarnation of bourgeois ideology-in-general. Juridic ideology is the one form that can sanction its categories directly by force: adjudication, punishment and restitution

1 A longer version of this article was originally delivered as a paper at the British Sociological Association Annual Conference in 1979

2 Edelman's method of working means that he tends to presuppose French legal institutions and forms of reasoning when he turns from definite texts to consider 'Droit'.

are internal to it as ideology. Its access as ideology to force is secured by the particular relation it bears to the state. In addition to receiving its power of sanction from the state, it also sanctions the state through its categories: in positing as integral to its action a realm of free possessive individuals it posits the state as the instance which secures through public power the private rights of individuals. Law and the state both emerge (in legal theory) from nature of man as such, as formulators and guarantors of his freedom.

The 'birth certificate of juridical ideology' (that is, of the categories necessary to the legal sphere), 'is the postulate that man is naturally a subject in law, that is a potential owner since it is his essence to appropriate nature' (p 27). This essential attribute of proprietorship (man's possession of himself) leads directly to *circulation*: subjects are free to dispose of their possessions, therefore exchange is also an inherent and essential relation between subjects. Edelman examines certain key texts of legal theory and philosophy, they all insist that the subject in law has these attributes of bourgeois self-possession *because* law corresponds to the essential nature and attributes of man. The texts say:

1) The subject in law is an abstraction from the attributes of the human person, the subjects law treats of are 'always already' subjects of a certain type. Law recognises, interpellates, men as 'always already' subjects; it invests men with attributes and draws the consequences — it insists that they be as it knows they are. Therefore, men are (in the law) subjects *independent of their will*; 'recognised' and treated as such by law, thus the propertyless are treated as possessive subjects, and, however poor and ignorant men may be, they are free and equal to all others.

2) Man is a subject because he is master of himself. Mastership is

self-possession, the subject has an inherent right and capacity of disposition over his own body. This essential self-possession is therefore the foundation of the right and capacity to acquire property in things. The freedom of man follows from his self-possession: man is his own property and enjoys the rights of its possession, he is free because he is at his own disposal. Man's attributes and characteristics (his labour, his reputation) are a definitive part of him and cannot be alienated against his will. The 'real' enters into law through the relation of the subject to things. The subject has a right to the portions of nature which he appropriates; because man's labour is an essential attribute so are the products in which it is invested. Man has a right to the 'fruits' of his labour, and so his alienation of those fruits in free contract for recompense is just another expression of his freedom. The wage contract flows directly from the self-possessive subject: freedom and property are inextricably linked, man is free because he is at the disposal of himself; he is possessor of himself. The sale of his labour is just another confirmation of his freedom and self-possession. Law posits the subject in the form of a commodity; man's freedom consists in putting himself into circulation.

Ownership of the Image (1) —

The Subject Creator

Hence the paradox of photography for the law of property. Edelman's original title puns on the law being 'seized' or caught out by photography. Photography is the making of an image of the 'real' by means of a certain apparatus and the agency of light. The question of the ownership of that image (rights to the control, reproduction and disposal of photographs) arises because that 'real' is always-already invested with subjects, it is the property of subjects.

The doctrine of the 'public domain' does not help resolve the paradox: 'public'

places, streets and the like, are conceived as harbouring common rights of use by all subjects, who can walk on, look at, point, etc, this domain without detriment to any other. These rights of use establish no exclusive property right. How can a painter or writer who describes a scene, say, a crowd in a public place, have any property right in this description? It is merely an account of a domain open to all, an image of what is public cannot but be a public image sharing the nature of what it depicts.

Literary and painterly property is established in French law by the category of *author's right*.³ Edelman treats author's right in terms of the concept of 'over appropriation of the real'. Literary property is *immaterial*: it does not diminish the public domain in appropriating it, for it does so in the form of an image. It is property none-the-less: Balzac made the point, to deprive authors, painters and other creative artists of the right to exploit the products of their labour is inequitable, it threatens all property right. Property flows from the subject, from his right to his labour and its products. Are artists to be denied the freedom of appropriation because of the *nature* of their products? If so, then who is safe? Hence the French bourgeoisie finds a doctrine which will save property for art and the public domain from art. The doctrine — presupposed in author's right — is 'over appropriation': the public domain is common property still, no one is harmed in their use of it because an image has been made of it, but this image can only be property to the extent that it is mixed with the subject, that it is

re-presented and transformed through his creative labour.

But in photography the subject is absent. Reality is appropriated in image by a mechanical contrivance. Photography is therefore denied author's right by the courts on the grounds of its non-creative nature. Man becomes invested in a 'soulless' machine: photography is not individual creative labour, in it man merely serves a machine, a machine which is not a *means* to an independent subjective end (an *idea* of an image, of which its physical form is the manifestation) but which itself determines the product independent of the subject.

This judgment persisted from the middle of the nineteenth century until the early decades of this century. Photography began at a craft stage, as an activity of amateurs and small tradesmen. The economic consequences of the absence of property right in photographs are unimportant either for men of culture or for capital. The early cinema industry was treated in the same way as still photography. It was a moving photography, a series of pictures and all without a soul. The cinema remains on a par with fairground shows, a spectacle and a threat to public order because of the powerful reality of its images (hence the banning of a film of an execution).

But the cinema, in which true labour is absent, becomes invested by capital, and the law begins to change its tune. The development of talkies multiplied the capital required for film production manyfold. This investment of capital requires a full securing of exclusive rights to the product, the abolition of risk. Existing property rights in the processes and the materials themselves could not secure against plagiarism. Hence the pressure for property rights in cinema images. There followed a 'shift in legal opinion'. The courts reverse their judgements and discover their 'mistake': the machine suddenly becomes a means to a creative

3 English copyright law is different. It does not derive the right to control the reproduction of a work from the notion that it is the product of a creative subject nor does it necessarily vest that right in the subject who actually makes the work. R F Whale *Copyright*, Longmans, 1971 clearly differentiates the two forms of right.

end, the creative subject and his purposes is installed behind the camera. But, the subject installed in the person of the 'creator' is capital. Edelman cites a judgement of the *Cour de Paris* of 1939 in which the right of ownership of the film as creative property is vested in the *producer*. The film is treated as a literary work recorded in images and sounds, creative in its *idea*. The director, cameramen, etc, merely actuate the script; the written text dictates the sequence of shots and this sequence controls these technicians who merely handle the *means* to creation, the camera.

The law recognises a collective subject of production, the cinema process, but in a form where property rights remain decisively with capital. There follows a struggle for the recognition of the rights of the 'creative' personnel. By the law of 1957 the director and others are recognised as co-authors, as parts of the collective-creative subject. But the law also recognises the necessity of a single locus of possession corresponding to the unity of the (collective) product, it requires an unqualified possession for commercial exploitation and this remains with capital. The creative personnel are invested with 'moral rights' in the work flowing from authorship. That is, rights to the product of their 'creative labour' which do not touch the substance of the product itself: they are entitled to protection of reputation and recompense, the removal of their name from the credits and damages. Thus a law — author's right — based on the unique attributes of the creative individual subject, actually serves to recognise capital as the subject of possession of images. Yet capital is never spoken of as such. Legal categories work, paradoxically and through contradictory shifts in opinion, to sanction forms outside those categories themselves.

Ownership of the Image (2) —

The Subject Possessor

Another paradox. The logic of the right

of the photographer over his photo also sanctions the right of the photographed over *his* image. In both cases the right derives from the subject being always-already possessor of itself and its attributes. We are now outside the 'public domain' and firmly in the realm of individual private property.

To take a photo without consent is to appropriate *consent*; to deny to the subject photographed his right to say yea or nay. That is, to deny his freedom which is the essence of his property — the right of disposal over himself and his other possessions. This infringement of the subject's proprietorial-freedom extends to the image of the possessions of the subject and does not stop at the image of the subject himself. These possessions are definitive of him: they are his 'image', invested with his reputation, and therefore equivalent to essential and constitutive attributes. They cannot be appropriated or misrepresented without damage to the subject: to place their image in an inappropriate context is to threaten the subject identified with them. The subject, defined in law as by nature of a form appropriate to commodity circulation — as proprietorial of itself and free to alienate itself, now *becomes* a commodity, its 'essence' is decomposed into commodities, into its possessions.

Edelman gives several examples of suits which are brought and won on the basis of this doctrine. Here for reasons of economy we will cite but one. A teacher at a high school, the *Institut Notre-Dame*, Mme Lemeiner, sued because her property had been used as the background in a photo-novel called 'Love Leads the Dance'. The basis of the suit was that her colleagues would recognise the property and surmise that she gave permission for its use. Hence the claim depended on alienation of consent in the opinion of others and on her consequent association with a work damaging to her reputation. She won!

The Role of Law in the Capitalist Mode of Production

Edelman has used this area of the law, faced with contradictions in its practice, to show the nature of legal categories and the work they do. He thus claims to reveal their symptomatic presence in practice. He then goes on to use this analysis of the proprietorial subject to state the relation of law to the Capitalist Mode of Production (CMP).

Law is a 'mystery': it stands to production in a mysterious form in that production is absent in it and yet by this 'absence' capitalism's conditions of operation are secured. Production's absence is the condition on which it can be present, that law can have its effects. The 'autonomy' of legal categories and the legal sphere is the condition of their effective functioning in relation to the mode of production. Law, far from being a reflection of capitalist production or an expression of capitalist class interest, constructs an 'imaginary' relation of agents to their conditions of existence: 'law assumes the double function of concretely and "imaginedly" fixing . . . that totality of social relations' (p 92). This fixing is 'concrete' and effective precisely *because* it takes a certain imaginary form. Edelman discusses this imaginary securing of the conditions of production by means of two theses.

Thesis I: *The law fixes and assures the realisation as a natural given of the sphere of circulation* (p 93).

This givenness of circulation stems from the interpellation of the subject in a commodity form as possessor of himself. Edelman adds:

I can therefore reply to the question opened up by Althusser. If it is true that all bourgeois ideology interpellates individuals as subjects, the concrete/ideological content of the bourgeois interpellation is that the individual is

interpellated as the embodiment of the determinations of exchange value. And I can add that the subject in law constitutes the privileged form of this interpellation to the exact extent that the law assures and assumes the effectivity of circulation (p 97).

The claim made here is that the *legal* interpellation of the subject is the fundamental form of bourgeois subjectivity. Subjects are 'recognised' in law as agents appropriate to circulation. This recognition is, however, no reflection of a prior existence, the realities of capitalist production. Law defines and sets the form of agents in capitalism without reference to these realities, and is a *condition* of capitalism. It can only exist through the forms of law.

Thesis II: *By assuring and fixing the sphere of circulation as a natural given, the law makes capitalist production possible* (p 103).

Subjects enter into law — and therefore into relations capable of sanctioning the forms they posit by force, thus concretising the imaginary — as equal possessors and free agents of contract. The category of subject in law constitutes the worker as a possessor, the sale of whose labour power is a free act of contract. Law conceives the consequences which follow from the sale as given in the terms of the contract, therefore the exploitation of the worker is 'outside' the law and invisible to its categories. Law makes the wage form possible, and in its 'imaginary' construction of the parties (as equal subjects, parties to an equitable contract) it creates the concrete conditions in which exploitation in production can exist. This action of the law is not a mere illusion, a screen to hide 'reality', or a fooling of one of the parties to the contract. Law both 'imaginatively' fixes and sanctions social relations. It compels things to be as it recognises they are. It

enforces the status of proprietorial subject, agents can only concretely exist for it and appear before it in that guise. It denies recourse beyond its forms, beyond the domain of circulation. The courts compel contracts (which, entered into, cannot be other than 'free') to be honoured.

Edelman's work concentrates on the commodity form of the subject, its centrality for the functioning of an 'autonomous' legal sphere, and the role of that sphere in constituting the imaginary and therefore real conditions for the functioning of capitalist

production. *Law* is the primary form in which the subject-agents of the CMP are constituted. Law, as a specific instance, constructs what it purports to 'recognise'. Law is a *condition* of capitalism — it makes its central relationships possible — but it is in no sense simply the product of what it serves to constitute. The 'imaginary' exists in a definite detachment from its functioning, and it is just this detachment that makes this functioning possible. This condensed summary cannot do justice to Edelman's complex, provisional and often cryptic arguments. We hope it is sufficient to arouse interest.

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VINCENT PORTER

FILM COPYRIGHT AND EDELMAN'S THEORY OF LAW

Edelman's 'Ownership Of The Image'¹ raises a number of problems for the British (and for the American) reader not only in relation to his general analysis of the theory of law, outlined above by Paul Hirst and Elizabeth Kingdom, but also in relation to the specific relevance of the theory of law to the theory of copyright on which his own analysis is based. I want to consider both the general and the particular problems raised by Edelman's analysis.

Let me start by repeating Edelman's argument, not as Hirst and Kingdom do, by elaborating and commenting upon it, but by tracing the *curve* and the *method* of Edelman's analysis. He starts by placing himself on 'the ground of theoretical struggle.'

It is the very ground imposed on me by what I am discussing, even if what I am discussing, the law, must be unaware that that is its ground. I mean that this is precisely the ground that the law circumscribes, and that the frontiers it seeks to mark out are the 'true' frontiers of its ideology. (Edelman p 22)

For Edelman, the *Marxist theory of law* (his emphasis) is still in its early stages. Despite Marx's works on the philosophy of law, his texts on the theft of wood and on censorship and the famous passage in *The German Ideology* where he demonstrated that

on the one hand the fact that private property has become entirely independent of the community, and on the other the illusion that private property itself is based solely on the private will, the arbitrary disposal of the thing. (German Ideology, quoted in Edelman p 23)

for Edelman, Marx says something more important

namely that the relation between the expression of the content and the effectivity of the content is ideological and that it is this relation itself that becomes a mysterious power the true basis of all property relations. (Edelman p 23)

and therefore Edelman's

ultimate theoretical project: to treat of a scientific discourse on law is also to treat of the discourse of the conditions of the necessary production

¹ Bernard Edelman, *Ownership of the Image, Elements for a Marxist theory of Law*, (translated by Elizabeth Kingdom with an introduction by Paul Q Hirst) Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979.

of juridical categories in the practice of law (Edelman p 26)

In his second chapter, Edelman brings together two series of texts. The first is a juridical introduction to the category of the subject in (French) law and the second a juridical explanation of that category by legal theorists. What is said in the texts is that man has a power given him by the concept of right, objective right. What is *occulted* in the texts however, Edelman observes, is the actual functioning of juridical ideology.

In other words, the functioning of juridical ideology renders 'useless' the question of its functioning. A little like Descartes' God, giving an ideological shove will get the machine going. We ask of a clock only that it tell the time, and we ask of justice only that it be just. It is sufficient to the law to say that man has a power, that this power protects his interest, and that his free will is a will that wills his interest in order to 'start' juridical ideology. The tautology is the ultimate process permitting operation on the real without denouncing it. (Edelman p 33)

Edelman's concern in the rest of the book is to show what it is that brings alive the primary category of the individual subject in law and how this reveals the imaginary relation of individuals to the relations of production.

The site which Edelman chooses for his theoretical investigation is the law of photography and of the cinema for there is in this 'insignificant' question *the entirety of the law in condensed form*, all the forms, visible and invisible, which govern it. (Edelman p 37, his emphasis) The juridical history of photographic and cinematic creation has two acts, and it is here that the law was 'surprised' by the new techniques for (re)producing the real, the techniques of photography and cinematography. Under the traditional

theory of the author's right in France, the painter was not just a copyist, he was a creator. The photographer, on the other hand, was not a creator since he merely operated a machine. According to the *Seine Tribunal de commerce* in its judgment on 7 March 1861,

the art of the photographer does not consist in the creation of subjects as its own creation, but in the getting of negatives and subsequently in the making of prints which reproduce the image of objects by mechanical means and in a servile way. (Daloz-périodique, 1861 part 3 p 32)

What is important is that 'the author' must always be present in the work. Once he or she disappears then he or she is 'mechanical' and the labour is disqualified, or as the *Seine Tribunal de commerce* put it,

the industry cannot be assimilated to the art of the painter or the sketcher who creates compositions and subjects with the sole resources of the imagination, or again, the artist who, following his personal feeling interprets the view-points which nature offers him and which constitute a property in his name. (ibid, p 8)

'As for cinematography, in the eyes of the French courts, the only difference between photography and cinematography was that the cinema 'moved' in a precise and mechanical way — as a series of photographs animated by a machine. In other words, the reproduction of the real is not, in any way, an artistic creation. Thus, the reproduction of a theatrical production, as the *Marseille Tribunal de simple police* ruled in its judgement of 30 January 1913, is realised by 'means of industrial processes (and so is) included in the definition of curiosity shows' (Daloz, *Sommaire* 23)

And so, at the end of Act I of the

legal history of photography and cinematography in France both means of reproduction were clearly classified as industrial and neither could be deemed artistic creation. During Act II however, the economic importance of the photographic and cinematographic industries was to lead to a fundamental revision of legal philosophising — euphemistically called ‘the veering of jurisprudential opinion’ — to give the photographic and cinematographic industries their ‘means’ of production.

The courts began to take heed of what the law did not define: ‘the characteristics which constitute a creation of the spirit or genius in an artistic product.’ (*Cour de cassation*, 28 November 1862) using the concept of ‘imprint of personality’ to wrest photography away from the machine and to bring it back into the realm of individual creation. This was achieved at a double price, argues Edelman; first, through the substitution of *technique* for the mechanical process of reproduction and, as a result, the intervention of the subject as such in the process of reproduction; and second, through the *subjectivisation of the machine*, whereby the labour of the machine becomes the labour of the subject. Thus no longer was creation subordinated to the ‘means’ of creation; now it was the ‘means’ that were subordinated to the finality of creation. In other words, photography benefited from legal protection only on ‘condition of bearing the intellectual mark of its author, the imprint necessary to the work’s having the characteristic of individuality necessary to its being a creation’ (*Cour de cassation, chambre civile I*, 23 June 1959) and if it reflected the personality of its author and revealed ‘the effort and the personal labour of the person capable of individualising it.’ (*Cour de cassation, chambre criminelle*, 7 December 1961)

The limitation is important, for no protection is granted for the photographic

reproduction of an ‘attractive’ girl; is in no way sufficient for the characterisation of the appropriation as intellectual (Edelman p 52), for ‘the mere features of a face . . . are not susceptible to appropriation’ (*Seine*, 3 March 1943). Thus the photographer acquired protection, but in association with his instruments of labour, the photographic apparatus. In short he was a craftsman. For film however, the question of who was the ‘author’ of a film was more problematic. For the courts it was the producer that was the person who realised the capitalist process in the film, thus bringing into the open the combination of intellectual and industrial production. The author/producer formed part of the apparatus of production he participated in the process of production in his very capacity as author. Indeed as Dullac noted in 1927 in his *Rapport au comité directeur de la Chambre syndicale cinématographique française*, the producer ‘directs all the successive elements from which stems the complete production of a cinema work for which he has complete responsibility’. By ‘responsibility’ he meant the entire financial responsibility. Or as the *Cour de Paris* ruled in its judgement of 16 March 1939,

Considering that legal protection of artistic property can, in the quite special and still new category of cinema creation, be fully assured for the producers, since the work would not exist without its intellectual labour . . . , considering that the producer, that is the physical or moral person whose profession is the realisation of cinema works, incontestably manifests himself through creative activity in the order of the intellect consistent with that required of every author; considering that he imagines and expresses ideas that will constitute the canvas, that he exercises a determinant influence over the entire direction and execution, and that it is under his creative direction,

whether personal or delegated, that he exercises his influence over hundreds of special assistants who are duly remunerated at a fixed rate or according to contract, who are in any case interchangeable with other employees with the same specialist skills, and who will proceed to the more or less intellectual or mechanical task assigned to them; considering that the distribution by the producer of the intellectual labour . . . could not have the consequence of all those who contribute to the sequence of the work's successive stages being given a personal right over the exploitation of the film (emphases in Edelman)

And thus, Edelman concludes, the true creative subject is capital. 'The determinant influence of capital becomes, for the law, the creative influence; financial direction becomes creative direction; the authors become proletarians who are paid for the job which accomplishes a "task" work and not a creative activity, halfway between man and the machine, and who can be shown the door if they do not give satisfaction.' (emphases in Edelman)

It only remained to define the limits of creativity. For the fictional or 'artistic' film this presented few problems, but for *verité*-type reportage the problem was more profound. According to Gaudel-Gruyer, writing in the prestigious *Revue Internationale des Droits d'Auteur* 'the visual creation must express the author's original thought through the reflection of its author's personality and through the choice and composition of images' ('La Réalité, source spécifique de la création télévisuelle' *RIDA*, April 1970) and that 'It is when it is carried into the very heart of reality that televisual art flourishes in a domain which it alone can perfectly explore' (*ibid*)

The *Tribunal de grand instance* was asked to rule whether a television broadcast could be legally protected by

copyright legislation, and on 28 April 1971 it ruled that

To watch a few scenes of mountains, taken in evocative and well chosen landscapes with peasants in their chalet or at a cheese market exchanging their cheeses for money with a typical retailer, living scenes taken from life, is enough to be convinced that this is indeed a question of creation.

As Edelman observes, 'Everything which is convincing looks true.'

For the British or American reader, Edelman's analysis of the twists and turns of French jurisprudence present something of a problem for it is specifically linked to the concept of the author's right on which French law is based. In a previous article (*Film Copyright: Film Culture*, Spring 1978, vol 19 no 1, pp 94-97) I summarised the differences between the French and the British and American ideologies of copyright and author's right, and it is questionable how much of Edelman's analysis is valid outside France, or at the most, continental Europe. Indeed, Edelman makes one classic howler, in trying to overstate his argument at this point. He attacks the ruling of District Judge Wyatt in the case brought by Life Magazine against Joshua Thompson, author of *Six Seconds in Dallas* who had reproduced 22 frames of the Zapruder film of Kennedy's assassination in his book. Judge Wyatt's ruling that 'Life claimed no copyright in respect of the actuality element of the event but only in respect of the particular form of the recording' was perfectly sound in American law which rests on a different legal theory to that of French law and which distinguishes between the copyrighted work and any 'idea, procedure, process, system, method of operation, concept, principle or discovery regardless of the form in which it is described, explained, illustrated or embodied in such work' (Public Law 94-553 s.102(b)).

Edelman also attacks District Judge Wyatt's ruling that each photograph reflects 'the personal influence of the author and that there are never two identical photographs' (Edelman p 67) Now, if Edelman had looked at the original judgement and had not quoted from Barbara Ringer's article 'Evolution de la jurisprudence aux Etats-Unis en matière de droit d'auteur' (RIDA, January 1971) he would have discovered (i) that the quotation cited as Judge Wyatt's was in fact a quotation by him of an earlier ruling by Judge Learned Hand in 1903 (Bleistein vs Donaldson Lithographing Co, 188 US 239, 23 S Ct 298, 47 L Ed 460 (1903)) and (ii) that Wyatt elaborated that

The Zapruder pictures in fact have many elements of creativity. Among other things, Zapruder selected the kind of camera (movies not snapshots), the kind of film (colour), the kind of lens (telephoto), the area in which the pictures were to be taken, the time they were to be taken, and (after testing several sites) the spot on which the camera would be operated. (293 F Supp 130, reproduced in Melville B. Nimmer, Cases and Materials on Copyright And other Aspects of Law Pertaining to Literary, Musical and Artistic Works, St Paul Minn, West Publishing Co, 1971)

However, although Edelman's knowledge of Anglo-American jurisprudence is poor, and on occasion wrong, it does not automatically invalidate either his specific conclusions about the contradictions of French jurisprudential theory, relating to the reproduction of photographs or his wider conclusions about the theory of law which he develops from his analysis of these contradictions. It is these latter conclusions that I now wish to explore before returning to the problems posed for copyright law both in European and in Anglo-Saxon jurisprudence which

emerge from Edelman's analysis.

Edelman continues his analysis by examining the contradictory philosophical assumptions which relate to the other major legal area relating to the ownership of the image — the control that an individual has over the portrayal of his or her own image. There are even more extensive differences between French legal theory and Anglo-American legal theory in this area than exist in the field of copyright, and an extended legal analysis is necessary to determine the extent to which Edelman's analysis extends beyond French law. In a general sense however, Edelman's conclusion, that the right of the photographed over his or her own image which derives from the subject being always-already possessor of itself and its attributes lead to the subject being defined in law as a commodity form, appropriate to commodity circulation which can be alienated from its owner and his or her 'essence'. This is a conclusion that can also be extended to Anglo-American legal practice.

At this point, Edelman's argument switches from the particular to the general. He induces that the contradictions which faced the French courts over the ownership of the image show the *general* nature of legal categories and the role they play in articulating the relations between the subject and the capitalist mode of production. And further, from this induction develops his two elements of a theory of law — namely that (i) 'the law fixes and assures the realisation as a natural given of the sphere of circulation'; and (ii) 'By assuring and fixing the sphere of circulation as a natural given, the law makes production possible.' (Edelman pp 93 and 103) (Note: not *capitalist* production as Hirst and Kingdom, in their article in this issue of *Screen*, maintain.) This argument involves a parallel inductive shift from a study of the relationship between the subject and his or her image

to an assertion about the relation between the subject and his or her labour power, and from there to a view of how subjects enter into law in an *imaginary* relation to each other — as equal possessors and free agents of contract.

It is necessary to trace Edelman's method of argument, for its very method is open to severe criticism. By choosing a relatively obscure branch of legal theory, that of the author's right, and exposing the philosophical contradictions inherent in that doctrine, Edelman rightly, and justifiably, exposes a contradiction in French legal theory. But by then adopting an inductive mode of argument to point to the primacy given by the courts to the sphere of circulation, Edelman does his argument a grave disservice. For by adopting this inductive shift, not only does he switch from one legal generalisation — that of the primacy of the human subject — to another legal generalisation — that of the primacy of the sphere of circulation, but he also ignores many of the ways in which, in French law, the circulation of works of art and thus of capital for their production, reproduction and performance is determined not only by the interests of capital but also by the interests of society and that in many cases these two interests are divergent. The fact is that once a work is published, the author enters into a contract with French society — as expressed in the French copyright law — as well as with (French) capital. The author's right in a work has a limited time span, which varies according to the nature of the work, and certain acts, such as copying for the purposes of study, are legally permitted and these exceptions run against the interests of capital. Edelman's second thesis about the relation between the sphere of circulation and the possibility of production is also placed in jeopardy by his inductive form of argument. In my view, it is not enough, to draw a doubtful parallel between the relationship between the subject as creator

or possessor of the photographic image and the subject and his labour power. Edelman gives no consideration to the differences between labour power in the extractive, productive, service or information sectors of the economy, and the differing roles of circulation within these sectors. Nor indeed, does he give any consideration to the role played by circulation in socialist as well as capitalist modes of production. These lacunae and methodological assumptions, must cast grave doubts on the sweeping nature of his theses, but, and this is also important to note, they do not mean that they are necessarily wrong. Indeed, the ultimate conclusions which Edelman himself draws from his own work are far more modest, than the grand theory of his previous chapters would suggest. Indeed, I would argue that they are unexceptionable, sane and pragmatic. Quoting Engels view that 'the real content of the proletarian demand for equality is the demand for the abolition of classes' (*Anti-Dühring*, Part I, chapter X, p 128, Lawrence and Wishart, 1969), he points to Marx's analysis of the *double frontier* of the classical bourgeois economy, the 'scientific' frontier and the 'ideological' frontier, which he spelt out in the afterword to the second German edition of *Capital*. So long as the capitalist regime was looked upon as the final form of social production, Political Economy could remain a science only so long as the class struggle was latent or manifested itself in isolated or sporadic phenomena. Once however, the class struggle took on more outspoken or threatening forms, it sounded the knell of scientific bourgeois economy.

It was thenceforth no longer a question, whether this theorem or that was true, but whether it was useful to capital or harmful, expedient or inexpedient, politically dangerous or not. In place of disinterested inquirers, there were hired prize-fighters; in place of genuine

scientific research, the bad conscience and the evil intent of apologetic. (Marx, Capital, vol I, Lawrence and Wishart, Afterword to the Second German Edition, p 15)

If bourgeois legal science fills the entire legal space, Edelman observes, this political space is the space of class struggle.

I can now return to the problem of film copyright, which is where Edelman began, and which is now the site of a class struggle between the owners of intellectual property and those without intellectual property — who could be termed the 'intellectual proletariat'. Copyright legislation, whether it is determined by national legislation or by international conventions is a sphere where new technology has given the class struggle an outspoken and threatening form. No longer is the classical capitalist mode of producing and performing film texts looked upon as the final form of social production, the video recorder is making it possible for the intellectual proletariat to fight back. The theorems of the author's right and of copyright which have both been adapted to the needs of intellectual capital, not only deprive authors of their rights but also as I have argued previously (see 'Film Copyright: Film Culture' *Screen*, vol 19 no 1) deprive the intellectual proletariat of its right to participate freely in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits as provided for in Article 27(1) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The inquiries and international conferences designed to bring the laws of copyright up-to-date are indeed, to paraphrase Marx, no longer peopled by disinterested inquirers, instead there are hired legal prize-fighters, and in place of genuine scientific research there is bad conscience and the evil intent of apologetic. There is virtually no place in this arena which

is not filled with bourgeois legal scientists.

Thus, in a very real sense, Edelman's conclusion is just. Since the legal space surrounding the circulation of intellectual property is filled with bourgeois legal science, the political space has become one of class struggle between the owners of audio-visual intellectual property who are trying to prevent their works being copied or performed unless financially reimbursed and the intellectual proletariat who have the technology to make copies and reperform these works in order to participate more fully in the cultural life of the community, not simply by paying to see one performance but by discussing, analysing, and reusing the work as part of their cultural activities. Are they simply 'pirates' or 'bootleggers' as representatives of the film industry would have us believe, or is a more profound and serious class struggle for the ownership of film culture under way? By forcing us to re-examine the origins of legal theory relating to the ownership of the photographic and filmic images, Edelman exposes the bourgeois assumptions at work in theories of the author's right and of copyright. For British law, the theory of the author's right may well take on a new and increased significance if the half-baked and ill-considered proposals of the Whitford Committee are embodied in a new Copyright Bill and if the ebb and flow of intellectual property in the United Kingdom is determined by this Bill, the free competition policy of the EEC, the decisions of the European Court of Justice in Luxembourg and the Stockholm and Paris texts of the Berne Convention. The area for struggle is already here.

As for Edelman's wider conclusions, I have my doubts. They are too simple, too sweeping in their generality. The law is always an arena for struggle, and to look for a general and simple marxist theory of law is, in my view, a romantic quest for a Holy Grail that does not exist.

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LETTERS FROM THE FILM WORK GROUP, P ADAMS SITNEY, JANET BERGSTROM AND CONSTANCE PENLEY

The Film Work Group,
Clive Myer and Nigel Perkins, write:

We should like to make a few comments in response to Clayton and Curling's article in *Screen* Spring 1979 vol 20 no 1 'On Authorship'. There is a great deal that could be said about the material in this article but for the moment we should like to concentrate on raising some problems with the separations made between the discourses of the independent film-makers and academic discourses and the influence they have on critics, BFI Production Board, other BFI departments, and also Clayton and Curling's notion of economic autonomy for independent film-makers where at the end of Section X they state that:

It seems absolutely clear that economic autonomy is the only basis on which independent film-makers as a constituted group will be able to move on to the crucial questions about which films they want to see made, and how, and why.

Clayton and Curling suggest that their central interest in the paper is an understanding of the way in which institutions of film theory affect circulation. The term 'circulation' not meaning merely 'distribution' and 'exhibition', but following Foucault,

meaning in addition the circulation of cinematic discourses which condition the production, distribution and exhibition of films. Clayton and Curling recognise and state that the notion of discourse allows for a more constructive development of the theory/practice arguments, dissociating 'theory' from conspiracy and allowing for the possibility of greater heterogeneity in theoretical writings, and that the term 'discourse' refuses to theory an autonomy of its own and insists that it be recognised in its particular order and effects including its institutional sites of utterance (quoting McCabe, *Screen* Winter 78/79 vol 19 no 4).

Clayton and Curling write as independent film-makers in *Screen*, a publication which represents perhaps the most influential position within current film and television criticism in Britain, but from a deeply academic position, with strict editorial control to ensure the quality and direction of the publication. Clayton and Curling are then forced to write in an academic form. They do this in order to make clearer some critical notions about independent cinema which arises from an investigation 'On Authorship' and how some practices in independent cinema question this notion. They try to make the article clear in the face of difficulty experienced by many film-makers in understanding articles in *Screen*. They accept the academic form

in order to help place independent cinema within critical discourse rather than allow it to be written off as Avant-Garde, Art, Amateur etc, and to suggest that independent cinema represents a critical presence in its practice.

We would like to point out that in our view it was, for instance, the influence of an academic practice that informed the BFI Production Board in 1977 when it cut off or did not renew a grant to Newsreel Collective, because of Newsreel Collectives' 'failure to intervene in the aesthetics of newsreel film'. In other words their work did not conform to the Production Board's idea of critical practice, the Production Board at the time being significantly informed by academic practice. Since the Production Board represents one of the major funding bodies for independent cinema, this act points to the control of one cultural discourse over another.

One of the funding institutions (or body of institutions) not mentioned in the article are educational institutions (schools of communication etc). A considerable amount of independent work comes from educational institutions, or has some association with them. In these institutions one finds that where a critical input is required, that this is produced in an academic discourse, in many cases joining very closely with the BFI through educational material which they produce and make available. The context in which the demand for independent cinema is produced is thus through various academic discourses. Clayton and Curling say that

theory should neither be identified simply with theoretical journals, for theoretical positions are articulated in the practices of film-makers, nor should it be understood as in some sense 'comprehending', providing a meta-discourse for the practice of independent film-making.

Since academic discourse and the practice of making films and television in educational institutions are in the majority of cases separated, then once again academic discourse controls intellectual work and in allowing this separation between physical and intellectual work to be maintained, leaves the production of film and television open to the pragmatism and empiricism of the established and dominant methods and approaches to production. In short these dominant methods remain unquestioned.

Under these circumstances, independent cinema does not contain the independence suggested by its designation. It is independent of the 'free market', but not the state. Such markets as exist for independent cinema, or have been developed and cultivated up to this point are usually state funded and significantly influenced by academic discourse; thus the demand for independent films is significantly determined by academic discourse.

In general, the aims and interests of particular academics and film-makers may be similar, however the institutional place from which they speak can produce radical differences in perspective. If one takes the example of Newsreel Collectives' severance from grant support; the effect of Newsreel Collectives' intervention in the aesthetics of newsreel film might be less important to independent cinema at this point in history than the instigation of a running grant support system for film groups which would help to sustain and develop a more committed independent sector. Film-makers have in general failed to respond critically to this dominance of an academic cultural discourse, caught as they are between the demands of the 'market place' and the cultural demands of the state, starved of funds and a consistent practice on which to build, forced into spasmodic defensive measures.

An independent cinema, independent of

the 'free market' cannot be free of the state, and in this area it follows that not only will it not be free of the domination of the academic institutions, but has itself developed in recent years through or in close association with academic cultural discourses.

The Independent Film-Makers Association (IFA) contains many academics who are involved in cultural production, and among film-makers within the IFA, many come from academic backgrounds which culturally determine their relation to problems in film and television. We think it can be seen that few escape the influence of academic discourses, even if they speak from the position of the 'Individual Creative Soul', a position strongly held in many art colleges for this is the other side of the academic coin.

Under the circumstances, it can be seen that there could be no such thing as economic autonomy, it must be either state controlled, influenced by whatever cultural discourse has ascendancy (in this case, a particular academic cultural discourse), or a certain autonomy from the state achieving some financial stability from the 'free market'. In these circumstances the particular kind of control exercised by the funding bodies is an important question for independent film-makers.

What is described in Clayton and Curling's article as the discourse of the film-maker, is not in any sense pure, or entirely separate from academic discourse, or without similar contradictions. The IFA have achieved considerable success in negotiating contracts concerning copyrights and distribution rights with the BFI Production Board, through sustained solidarity among film-makers, and more recently the Independent London Film Centres have been formed within the IFA. But it must be stressed that there is no simple discourse of the independent film-maker, or any simple economic autonomy.

P Adams Sitney writes:

In the autumn 1978 issue of your magazine you published 'The Avant-Garde: Histories and Theories', a tandem set of reviews by Constance Penley and Janet Bergstrom which contain a few misconceptions about Anthology Film Archives and about my own writing which I hope to correct in the following letter. The two authors present different but interlocking arguments and sign themselves as representatives of a collective. In order to unravel the network of implications in their articles I shall have to consider them separately.

Ms Penley accurately focuses on the unfortunate banality which Marilyn Singer introduced into the collection *A History of the American Avant-Garde Cinema* when she wrote without apparent reflection of a new criticism and a new way of looking at film. The thrust of Ms Penley's essay is that the volume in question failed to offer a new criticism. She is on the ball there. More dubiously she considers the contributors to that volume to be following within a phenomenological tradition. It is a commonplace now in America for the writers of comparative literature term papers to peek behind texts for the philosophical assumptions generating them. Ms Penley gazed and found a Merleau-Pontian phenomenology. I imagine several of those writers will be surprised, but as no harm was intended they should take it as a compliment. Ms Penley has a knack for stumbling across phenomenologists as we shall see. The fact that Marilyn Singer pretentiously introduced their essays with claims about a new criticism is a burden they will have to bear, even though they did not see that silly introduction before it reached print along with their contributions. I, however, should not be encumbered with Ms Singer's hyperbole for a trenchant reason which I will expound shortly.

First, I observe a typographical error,

for which I assume Ms Penley could not be responsible, which footnotes my book, *Visionary Film*, as the source of Ms. Singer's remarks. I am confident that sloppiness of this order embarrasses any editor [*yes indeed, we are embarrassed and apologise for this error, Ed*] and I would not have mentioned it if it were not an 'accidental' paradigm of the way in which my work has been assimilated to Ms Singer's claims by Ms Penley herself. For she chastizes *The Essential Cinema*, which I edited and to which I contributed, and *Visionary Film*, which I wrote, for not living up to the requirements of the hypothetical new criticism. On page 114 she zeroes in on *The Essential Cinema* as the clearest example of the failure of Ms Singer's pipe dream. Apparently the collection is not 'compatible with evolving a theory of film, or even a new criticism.' Right she is again, and if I had made Ms Singer's claims I would be stunned right now. By 'evolving a theory of film' she seems to mean subscribing to whatever orthodoxy M Metz is currently promulgating for his faithful. The incompatibility is hopeless; even I would agree.

On page 116 she reaches the scathing centre of her essay and offers to ventriloquise a theoretical position for both Annette Michelson and myself at the same time:

In the work of Michelson, as well as that of P Adams Sitney, the phenomenological approach is not meant as an exterior analysis 'applied' to the film; for them it is a description of both the intentional efforts of the film-makers and an analysis of the nature of film; in other words, their critical discourse justifies itself by the belief that their methodology mirrors filmic processes and that film is the perfect phenomenological scene: Merleau-Ponty calls film 'the phenomenological art.'

It seems that Annette Michelson and I are members of a rather diaphanous collective ourselves. Ms Michelson's film criticism is the most distinguished I have encountered in our pathetically impoverished field; it does not need my justification to your readers or to Ms Penley and her collective; if it is indeed 'phenomenological' it has certainly acknowledged its debts to Husserl and his heirs. I do not have the benefit of Annette Michelson's studies in Paris, but I am happy that Ms Penley grants me such elevated company, even if she misses her opportunities in doing so. (I admit to having been an avid reader of Heidegger for many years, but I am afraid that my writing is not so fundamental as to make that influence easily legible.) No, I am not a phenomenologist, nor do I have any access to the 'intentional efforts' of film-makers aside from the necessarily ambiguous things they say or write about their films. Nowhere have I made claims about the true 'nature' of film itself. As a matter of fact, I have been engaged for several years on a book about the rhetorical instability of all efforts to pin down, polemically or descriptively, the true nature of film; I believe one can study fundamental theories without expounding one. Certainly I never pretended that my attempts at interpretation and the conclusions I have drawn from seeing and writing about a body of films for two decades mirror the processes by which those films were made or operate. *Visionary Film* interprets many films. I trust that Ms Penley and Ms Bergstrom have seen those films even though they do not address themselves to a single issue of interpretation. (There is a fad in the American academic world for analysing critical texts without knowing the works they address, but I find it hard to imagine that Ms Penley or Ms Bergstrom would be so unscrupulous as to proceed along those lines without mentioning it.) The only way my book has to 'justify itself' is on the validity of the interpretations

it offers. The overriding historical arguments (which Ms Bergstrom enumerates and posits as the locus of the book's controversiality) derive from the interpretation of those films and of theoretical texts by the men and women who made them; they are worthless without the detailed analysis upon which they rest.

If Ms Penley wants to view me as another closet phenomenologist, I can bear it, so long as she does not make theoretical claims on my behalf (or my half-behalf as I seem to share a *credo* with Annette Michelson). In so doing she cuts me off from the latest position of M Metz, and for that I am most grateful. Furthermore if she takes the vocabulary which includes 'mind' and 'consciousness' as phenomenological rather than Romantic (for I have to confess deeper debts to Coleridge, Shelley, Hoelderlin, and even Hegel, than to Merleau-Ponty) that is a synecdoche of her own devising. At least she does not pretend to being an historian.

Ms Bergstrom's article is both more mature and more insidious. When she focuses upon *The Essential Cinema* she draws attention to its polemical preface without noting that only a small portion of the book contains essays on the American avant-garde cinema. 218 out of 243 pages of text are devoted to other aspects of the Anthology Film Archives collection.

Where Ms Penley limited herself to out-of-context quotations and interpolating theoretical positions, Ms Bergstrom supplies the reader with background information about the influence of Anthology Film Archives, myself, and Annette Michelson on other institutions. In principle such journalism should have a place in a journal such as yours, but only if it is responsible and accurate. Ms Bergstrom's favourite adverb for avoiding the significant accuracy is 'virtually'. Its double appearance on p 123 covers up important gaps in her story. I

assume that the author is well-intentioned and did not know the details involved. She made no effort, however, to substantiate the melancholy innuendoes of her 'research'. In associating me with *A History of the American Avant-Garde Cinema* she made an ironical and ironically offensive mistake.

Here are the facts. 'Virtually' all the essays in *A History of the American Avant-Garde* were written by NYU graduate students. Only one, the introduction by Ms Singer, was not. (Of course the one page 'Preface' by Willard Van Dyke was not as well.) It is also true that 'until fairly recently' I taught at NYU. Annette Michelson still teaches there. All of the contributors have been in her classes, although at least one, Fred Camper, was publishing on the subject for a decade before he became her student. John Hanhardt had left NYU before I was appointed.

At the first faculty meeting of the fall semester in 1975 the new acting chairman Professor William Simon revealed to the faculty that an agreement had been made between the Whitney Museum (where John Hanhardt directs the film programme), the American Federation of Arts (where Steven Aronson, the husband of Marilyn Singer, directs the film programme) and the NYU Cinema Studies Department to apply for a grant for this project (the book and travelling programme for which it is a catalogue). He wanted the approval of the faculty even though the move had been made without our consultation. The advantage for NYU, he told us, was that our graduate students would have the exclusive privilege of writing (for a small fee) texts for the book. I felt that the whole business stank of corruption, that catalogue texts should not be treated as patronage, and that NYU should not align itself, especially sight-unseen, with a selection of films and a promotional venture that was both dubious and out of control. I was voted down, and some

graduate students present went so far as to suggest that I had some obscure personal advantage at stake in my opposition to this plan. That day I resigned my appointment at NYU.

Naturally I am somewhat sensitive to the compound associations both Ms Penley and Bergstrom make between my writing and that book. The selection of films Mr Hanhardt made was not based upon the collection of Anthology Film Archives; it largely coincided with it. A more generous observer might have concluded that the fact that only six of the thirty-eight films he selected were not part of the Anthology Film Archives treasury attests to the thoroughness of that collection. She might have wondered too what happened to the one hundred and fifty films (approximately) in Anthology's American avant-garde collection that disappeared from Mr Hanhardt's history.

Ms Bergstrom's deadly adverb returns to imply an international conspiracy. She claims the Musée Pompidou 'bought virtually Anthology's entire collection as its foundation collection of experimental film.' Peter Kubelka advised the acquisition of a collection of avant-garde films for the show 'Une Histoire du Cinéma.' He is a member of the Anthology Film Archives selection committee. I do not have a list of the Beaubourg's acquisitions, but a quick count of the film-makers represented in their catalogue shows forty-eight of one hundred and three who are not represented in Anthology Film Archives. I do not know what a 'foundation collection' is. But the first avant-garde films Paris bought were those shown by Annette Michelson (who is not on the Anthology Film Archives selection committee) at the Festival of Montreux. I am confident a survey of the holding in American avant-garde film at the Film Department of the Museum of Modern Art would show a substantial duplication of the collection of Anthology Film Archives. Big deal.

The implication, of course, is that there were many films which should have been substituted for these. Ms Bergstrom gives no examples of what Mr Hanhardt might have chosen instead. For Anthology Film Archives she offers a list of seven titles, every one of which was made or shown in America after *The Essential Cinema* was published. She draws her knowledge of the Anthology collection from that book. Here she is being simply disingenuous. Anthology Film Archives has recently suffered from financial problems and there have not been selection committee meetings or new acquisitions for some years. There are films on her list which have been championed by members of the selection committee. I have not seen all of them myself and must therefore refrain from further comment on their appropriateness for that collection.

The meanness of Ms Bergstrom's perspective is apparent at the end of her article which is simultaneously her clearest polemic. A pluralism of traditional critical stances which characterises the writing on avant-garde films in America becomes in her typically ungenerous voice a 'methodological hodge-podge . . . unified through the priority given to formal description and the total absence of reference to film as a discursive practice.' 'Hodge-podge' is good rhetoric but 'discursive practice' is sheer jargon, a bacchic whoop to rally the *Screen* readers to sustain the cult of Lacan and Metzian analysis. This hardly constitutes an adequate criticism of the interpretations ventured in *The Essential Cinema* and *Visionary Film*, or in the writings of Annette Michelson who, despite what appears through the optics of *Camera Obscura* as our close relationship, would not share my dismay at M Metz and his theoretical daughters.

M Metz is elusive before the critical gaze because he is a notoriously fickle theoretician. Each long text or book he produces disavows the last. I guess this

instability is what Ms Penley optimistically calls 'evolving' a film theory. M Metz is too 'theoretical' in his writings to be grounded by the analysis of particular films; and when he ventures into a detailed example he can be grotesquely inaccurate. Should your reader ever have the misfortune to have to attend a screening of *Adieu Philippine*, a dismal beach film to which M Metz devotes more attention than to any other work in the corpus of his writings, I would hope they compare his descriptions with the film. Even at the point where for once his analytical cool cracks and he gurgles over 'cet admirable plan-séquence, d'une grand continuité lyrique,' (p 160 of *Essais sur la Signification au Cinéma*), even there at the privileged moment, his blindness takes over. What is interesting about this poor sequence is that it is not a shot at all but a series of jump cuts — as cars pass close to the camera — each synchronised to a change of sound — from dialogue to music, etcetera. I dwell on this not simply to ridicule M Metz, who kissed his first book goodbye a long time ago, but because it is characteristic of his inattention to detail at all times. There are many errors of fact in my own writings of which I am ashamed and seek to correct. M Metz however elevates his disregard for films into a general theory of cinema in his latest pseudopsychanalytical contributions. He and the writers of the *Camera Obscura* collective must be aware of the dangers of a psychoanalytic discourse not grounded in clinical research. Psychoanalytic criticism by doctors of literature in the Thirties should be a sufficient admonition to the current aspirants of amateur speculation. Ms Penley cites twice M Metz's essay, 'The Imaginary Signifier' (*Screen*, vol 16 no 2). I presume that is what Ms Bergstrom has in mind when she speaks of theoretical work informed by psychoanalytical theory. M Metz's essay does not ground its speculations with even one example

from any film. For my part I have not found a single article informed by Lacanian analysis that provides significant new insights into any film among the many texts that have recently entered the Anthology Film Archives library. What Ms Bergstrom calls a methodology might well turn out to be a cultish fad.

This is certainly not true of all psychoanalytic interpretations of films. A recent lecture that Dr Leon Balter has given on *Alexander Nevsky* (at the Bronx Municipal Hospital Centre in January 1977) could be cited as a profound counter-example to the airiness of M Metz and his cult. (Unfortunately Dr Balter prefers to publish his analysis in a psychoanalytical journal, where the backlog is great, rather than *Film Culture* which sought it.) Dr Balter has preserved the rigorous economy of facts, as prescribed by Freud, in his discussion of the sado-masochistic mechanisms which make Eisenstein's film persuasive. The academic acceptance of a psychoanalytic theory of cinema that ignores the details of films is nothing short of a scandal. There is a grave danger in equating 'theoretical discourse' with freedom from specifics. But the casualness with which Ms Penley reads so-called phenomenological criticism and with which Ms Bergstrom informs your readers of behind-the-scenes connections among critics stinks of this same theoretical aloofness from the hodge-podge of facts and nuances.

The scandal looms even in the magazine of the *Camera Obscura* collective. Two major theoreticians of the avant-garde cinema were women and feminists. While *Camera Obscura* was translating and publishing Jean-Louis Baudry, Anthology Film Archives was translating for the first time and publishing the theoretical texts of Germaine Dulac (*The Avant-Garde Film: A Reader of Theory and Criticism*, ed P Adams Sitney, NYU Press, 1978). While they were generalising about 'The Apparatus', *Film Culture* was preparing for print 'The Legend of Maya Deren' by

three energetic women concerned with history, detail, and accurate texts of Maya Deren's theory of film. I anticipate a better record for *Camera Obscura* in the future.

In summary, the accusation of methodological conformity and the implication of a monopolistic conspiracy turns out to be little more than the erroneous impressionism of two devotees to a fashionable but unproductive cult of 'evolving theory'. When they can show how their theory illuminates works of the American avant-garde cinema they will begin to have a case. I for one am intensely interested in the films in question and eagerly await their insights. My writing has in no way satisfied the need for more attention to these crucial films. Until they are prepared to do that hard task, writers like Ms Penley and Ms Bergstrom will, I am afraid, have to resort to culling absurdities such as Marilyn Singer's naïve claim of a new criticism for a new cinema and then to pretending that others subscribe to it.

15 JANUARY 1979

Constance Penley replies:

This reply is addressed more to the readers of *Screen* than to P Adams Sitney. The depth of his condenscension toward Janet Bergstrom and myself as critics and the intensity of his dismissal of psychoanalysis and semiology ('a cultish fad') preclude any 'exchange' with him. The spirit and tone of P Adams Sitney's letter reveals as much about the weaknesses of some of his positions as his unwillingness to address the main points of our article. Specifically, he never responded to my characterisation of the majority of American avant-garde film criticism as formalist and as incapable of dealing with either the unconscious effects of film on the spectator, or with the

cinematic institution, because of its unquestioning adoption of 'consciousness' as the model for filmic processes. Instead, he constructed a straw man by collapsing all of psychoanalytic film theory on to the work of Christian Metz and then damning Metz for what he never intended to do in the first place, that is, justifying interpretations of specific films.

I would like to state briefly the differences I see between Sitney's approach to interpreting films and what I referred to as 'an evolving film theory'. Sitney avows that films should be approached inductively, the validity of the interpretations resting on 'facts' to be found in the films and in the writings of the film-makers. Historical conclusions arise out of the accumulation of detailed interpretations. As I stated at the end of my part of the article, this kind of methodical work is useful and necessary (and, indeed, some of Sitney's interpretations are among the most interesting to be found in American avant-garde criticism). But another kind of activity, call it 'theoretical' if you will, is also needed. A more deductive approach involves a necessary questioning of the status of those 'facts'. Its methodology would treat these facts as a construction of the analyst according to the level and purpose of the analysis. The validity of the analysis, then, rests not on the interpretative power of the theorist but on the coherence and economy of the model and its ability to generate useful knowledge about films and about the cinematic institution. That Sitney's marshalling of facts, specifics, details and nuances of films does not always lead to the 'right' interpretations can be seen, for example, in his recent Pacific Film Archive (Berkeley) presentation in which he maintained that Peter Kubelka is the successor of the Soviet revolutionary film-makers, a remarkably ahistorical conclusion to his research.

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Sitney will not allow that a psychoanalytically-informed semiology has

made any productive contribution to film study. He describes the totality of this approach through caricaturing the work of one theorist, Christian Metz. (It's important to discuss Metz here, since, after all, Janet Bergstrom and I are used merely as the means of getting at the real target.) The crux of Sitney's resistance to this psychoanalytic work rests in his accusation that Metz does not concern himself with individual films. I believe that Sitney objects to that aspect of the psychoanalytic study of film which wants to address the institution of cinema as a whole rather than the interpretation of specific films. Both Christian Metz's 'The Imaginary Signifier' and 'The Fiction Film and its Spectator', Jean-Louis Baudry's 'Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus' and 'The Apparatus: Metapsychological Approaches to the Impression of Reality', try to circumscribe the psychoanalytic bases of film's very intelligibility and ask such questions as 'What is "identification"?', 'From whence comes "the desire to go to the cinema"?', 'What are the relations which hold between the social, economic and technological machine of cinema and our psychical apparatus?' As I said, this work is not, and never intended to be, interpretations of individual films.

From reading Sitney's letter one would think that none of the psychoanalytic-semiological film theory has addressed itself to specific films. He uses the work of Dr Leon Balter (implying that only clinicians should talk about the psychic functioning of film?) as a foil to Metz's metapsychological 'airiness'. He warns us that an 'academic acceptance of a psychoanalytic theory of cinema that ignores the details of films is nothing short of a scandal.' But Sitney can only expose this particular scandal by himself ignoring a by now well-known body of work. This is not the place to give a bibliography but I could at least remind readers of the work of Stephen Heath on *Touch of Evil* and *Suspicion*, Jacqueline

Rose on *The Birds*, Thierry Kuntzel on *M* and *The Most Dangerous Game* and Raymond Bellour on the films of Hitchcock, Hawks, Lang and, recently, Griffith. In order to cite this work in my article I chose the exemplary work of Thierry Kuntzel in saying 'That this degree of abstraction is able to remain close to the film can be seen in the work of, for example, Thierry Kuntzel in which semiological and psychoanalytic structures are worked in close relation to a minute description of the temporal engenderment of the film.' If Sitney chooses to dismiss this extensive work because it has largely concerned classical film, then he is extending the dangerous attitude that Janet Bergstrom pointed to when she described the widespread disavowal by American avant-garde film critics of any relation between the workings of the classical film and the 'experimental' cinema. Importantly, too, a close reading of the work in this field is the clearest demonstration that the metapsychological studies and the textual analyses are constantly cross-referenced. The different levels of work are, in practice, completely interdependent.

P Adams Sitney accuses me of indiscriminately finding phenomenologists everywhere. However, I was not interested in flushing out closet phenomenologists and forcing them to identify themselves as belonging to the school of Merleau-Ponty or Heidegger. I think that I adequately characterised what I consider to be a phenomenological approach in my article. If Sitney thinks that I have confused the Romantic notion of consciousness with phenomenology's idea of consciousness, that is because I was indeed suggesting that there are links between phenomenology and Romanticism, or at least that the version of phenomenology, à la the American avant-garde critics, is Romantic.

Finally, Sitney makes several accusations of rhetorical shiftiness. But, among my many objections to his manner

of arguing, one stands out: the way he attempts to play women off against each other. First, he says that 'Ms Bergstrom's article is both more mature and more insidious [than Ms Penley's].' Then he compares the *Camera Obscura* Collective to the *Legend of Maya Deren* Project, implying that the latter is more feminist; they are writing about the life and work of one woman whereas *Camera Obscura* has been known to print theoretical articles by men. Trying to create those kinds of divisions between women is more than a rhetorical strategy; it is a well-known political one.

What is needed is a critical assessment of the American film avant-garde and its criticism. I hope that in the future this will be accomplished with a great deal more intellectual and personal generosity.

12 OCTOBER 1979

Janet Bergstrom replies:

I would like to respond to several points in P Adams Sitney's letter.

1) Mr Sitney makes the case for institutional collusion even stronger by the inside information he provides in his letter. While he exonerates himself personally from involvement in a particular deal, he gives even more evidence of the interconnections between avant-garde film institutions that I was able to cite.

2) Mr Sitney notes that I concentrated on the polemical introduction to *The Essential Cinema*, neglecting to discuss the greater part of the book which concerned films outside the American avant-garde.

It was an editorial decision on the part of *Screen* to omit a section describing the rest of the book, since it was thought to duplicate material in Constance Penley's review. I might mention now, however, that I wanted to

draw the reader's attention to the excellent and useful articles by Michelson on Vertov, Lawder on Eisenstein, and Sitney on Dovzhenko, Bresson and Snow. On the other hand, *The Essential Cinema* suffers greatly from the inordinate number of pages given over to Ken Kelman's writing — half the articles and 95 pages — mainly superficial plot summaries and lifeless biographical information. (Ken Kelman is a member of the Anthology Film Archives selection committee.)

3) I was pleased that Mr Sitney thought my use of 'hodge-podge' good rhetoric, but must say that the way he picks out my use of the phrase 'discursive practice' as jargon is sleazy rhetoric on his part. Granted, had I *only* thrown in 'discursive practice', I might be blameworthy. However, I carefully went on to explain what I meant by the term and then gave a lengthy example through an analysis of Chantal Akerman's *News From Home*. A similar use of low-level argument can be found near the beginning of Mr Sitney's letter when he implies (through praeterition) that Constance Penley and I probably hadn't seen enough American avant-garde films to be able to review his books.

4) P Adams Sitney should certainly be acknowledged as one of the most experienced and thoughtful spectator-critics of the American avant-garde cinema. He needn't stoop to casting aspersions on the qualifications of his reviewers. Our interest was clearly of a more general nature than addressing specific points of interpretation. Mr Sitney's reply states that *Visionary Film* stands or falls on the strength of its individual interpretations. He failed, however, to address any of the critical issues raised in the article: about the structure and general aims of his book, the suggestion of a different emphasis in analysis as in the example of *News From Home*, or the question of personal vision.

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'scandal' looming over *Camera Obscura* is fairly amusing. For one thing, it is all to Mr Sitney's credit — rather than somehow to our discredit — that he published Germaine Dulac's work in *The Avant-Garde Film: A Reader of Theory and Criticism*. Secondly, the editors of *Camera Obscura* have been friends of the *Legend of Maya Deren* Project for years, and have supported

their excellent project all along. An interview with the group describing their backgrounds and the history and aims of the project has been published in *Camera Obscura* 3-4, and we look forward to reviewing the first volume of *The Legend of Maya Deren* as soon as it is published.

12 OCTOBER 1979

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SCREEN INDEX 1980
(Volume 20)

PAUL ABBOTT

Authority vol 20 no 2 pp 11-64

TONY BEETON

Response to 'The Two Worlds of Marrakech' vol 20 no 1
pp 135-141

RAYMOND BELLOUR

Cine-Repetitions vol 20 no 2 pp 65-72

BERTOLT BRECHT

Radio as a means of Communication, a talk on the function of
Radio vol 20 no 3-4 pp 24-28

SUE CLAYTON AND JONATHAN CURLING

On Authorship vol 20 no 1 pp 35-61

IAN CONNELL

Television, News and the Social Contract vol 20 no 1 pp 88-107

PAM COOK

Star Signs vol 20 nos 3-4 pp 81-89

Film Work Group Letter vol 20 nos 3-4 pp 149-151

MICHEL FOUCAULT

What is an Author? vol 20 no 1 pp 13-33

NICHOLAS GARNHAM

Subjectivity, Ideology, Class and Historical Materialism vol 20
no 1 pp 121-133

PETER GIDAL

The Anti-narrative (1978) vol 20 no 2 pp 73-93

STEPHEN HEATH

Afterword (to Peter Gidal: The Anti-Narrative (1978)) vol 20
no 2 pp 93-99

PAUL HIRST, ELIZABETH KINGDOM

On Edelman's *Ownership of the Image* vol 20 nos 3-4 pp 135-
140

STUART HOOD

Brecht on Radio vol 20 nos 3-4 pp 16-23

RICHARD KEARNEY

Joyce on Language, Women and Politics vol 20 nos 3-4 pp 124-
134

PAUL KERR

Edinburgh Television Festival 1979 vol 20 nos 3-4 pp 107-110

MALCOLM LE GRICE

Towards Temporal Economy vol 20 nos 3-4 pp 58-79

STUART MARSHALL

Video-Technology and Practice vol 20 no 1 pp 109-119

STEVE NEALE

Triumph of the Will—Notes on Documentary and Spectacle vol
20 no 1 pp 63-86

GEOFFREY NOWELL-SMITH

Radio On vol 20 nos 3-4 pp 29-39

VINCENT PORTER

'On Authorship'—A reply vol 20 no 2 pp 113-117

Film Copyright and Edelman's Theory of Law vol 20 nos 3-4
pp 141-147

KEVIN ROCKETT

Irish Cinema—Notes on some Nationalist Fictions vol 20 nos
3-4 pp 115-123

P. ADAMS SITNEY

Letter vol 20 nos 3-4 pp 151-159

ROD STONEMAN

Film-Related Practice and the Avant-Garde vol 20 nos 3-4
pp 40-57

LESLEY STERN

Feminism and Cinema—Exchanges vol 20 nos. 3-4 pp 89-105

FELIX THOMPSON

Trapline, Syntax—Notes on Reading of Avant-garde Films
vol 20 no 2 pp 101-111

JOHN WYVER

The Debate on TV4 vol 20 nos 3-4 pp 111-114